WOMEN IN MOTION:
DANCE, GESTURE, AND SPECTACLE IN FILM, 1900-1935

By

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The image of the woman in motion provides a particularly fluid, spectacular, and conflicted icon for representing women during the first several decades of this century. From the avant-garde status of Loie Fuller's "Fire Dance" to Lillian Gish's modern dance connections, from Louise Brooks's chorus girl background to the "exotic" fascination of Josephine Baker, the woman in motion generates multidisciplinary interest. I have selected the figure of the woman in motion because she suggests that ambiguous distinction between actual and virtual gesture, between moving and dancing, between women and "Woman." My dissertation considers the signifiers of gesture and dance from an historicized semiotic perspective. Fuller, Gish,

Brooks, and Baker all demonstrated movement styles that reflect the influence of modern dance. The gestures and dances of these four women provide a starting point that I read against an iconographic "grid" drawn from art movements, actors' manuals, modern dance, physical culture, autobiography, cultural theory, and film theory.

The dissertation begins with the scientific appeal of Loie Fuller's modern dance under electric lights and ends with the primitivism of Josephine Baker's performance in *Princess Tam Tam*. This trajectory suggests a modernism that moves from an infatuation with the new science and technology to a rejection of it, from a jingoistic national rhetoric of the body to a troubled post-colonial identity. Threaded through this trajectory travel images of the woman in motion, fluid signifiers of femininity that defined as much as they were defined by the modern experience. The nature of the reception of these four womens' performances reflects the contradictory desires involved whenever women in motion function as icons for modernity. Out of these contradictions emerge moments of identification that offer the possibility for a more progressive kind of feminine "syntax," for another way of speaking feminine difference.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

> A *modern* woman, filled with the modern spirit. . . . she is no virgin, silly and ignorant of her destiny; she is an experienced but pure woman, in rapid movement like the spirit of the age, with fluttering garments and streaming hair, striding forward. . . . That is our new divine image: the Modern.[1]

When Eugen Wolff used these words in 1888 to define "die Moderne," he initiated the use of the woman in motion as an icon for the artistic, philosophical, and cultural movements affiliated with Modernism.[2] Wolff's description reflects an attitude about women, modernity, and motion that can be traced for several decades throughout Europe and the United States, in art movements and critical discourse, in painting, photography, film, and theater. His description helps to explain the turn-of-the-century popularity of women such as Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller, who shocked the public with their translucent costumes and bare feet, and entranced it

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[1] Quoted in Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, *Modernism: 1890-1930* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1974), 41-42; Also quoted in David Davidson. "From Virgin to Dynamo: The 'Amoral Woman' in European Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 21, no.1 (Fall 1981), 44.

[2] Bradbury and McFarlane cite Wolff as the inventor of the term "die Moderne," but they do not comment on his use of a woman as icon for Modernism.

with their movements. The woman that Wolff represents offers a vision of female spectacle that was inherently ambivalent: "she is no virgin," and yet she is "pure." She carries with her the implicit contradictions involved whenever woman functions as spectacular icon for male consumption. She remains, on one level, a feminine Muse, the inspiration for masculine creativity, but lacks herself, the qualities that define the Romantic and Modern conceptions of artistic genius.[3] On another level, though, this "New Woman" acquired signifiers of action and confidence that seem distinctly different from images of Victorian restraint.[4] She is represented in "rapid movement . . striding forward," as an image that invoked the "spirit of the age," and that associated gestures with both sexuality and technology. Writers, artists, and scientists proclaimed her figure to be "modern," not only because of the changing signifiers of femininity, but also as a result of the transformation of her movements through the technology of the camera.

I define the term "icon" both in terms of the dictionary meaning of an image or object of "uncritical devotion," and in the linguistic sense, defined by Charles Sanders Peirce,

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[3] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 35-42.

[4] For a history of images of early twentieth century women see Martha Banta, *Images and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

as a sign that bears a strong visual resemblance to what it represents.[5] By using Peirce's sense I locate the woman in motion firmly within a field of visual representation that includes painting, photography, and film. But the woman in motion generated effects far beyond the representation of her image, effects that are present in the writings from the turn-of-the-century through 1935, and that identify the woman in motion as an icon in the more classical sense. The circulation of the image of woman as sign during this period reflects the changing status of signs as much as the changing status of women; both are defining markers of *modernism*.

The meanings and origins of modernism and its effects are a hotly debated issue; my thesis brings together two strains of this debate. The first strain focuses on modernism as defined through changes in visual culture due to new technologies originating in the nineteenth century but developed in the twentieth. The second considers changes in the meaning of the "modern woman" as she is defined by her bodily movement. Following Jean Baudrillard, Jonathan Crary argues that modernity involves the nineteenth century observer in a different relationship to signs.[6] The sign's

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[5] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1985); Charles Sanders Peirce, *Elements of Logic, Vol. II*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932).

[6] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

new-found *arbitrariness*, its ability to circulate and exchange, establishes a new field of movement, one in which the visibility of bodies, products, and transportation is made possible by the invisibility of other types of movement, such as the movement of film through a projector or capital through a market.[7] What ties these two strains together is the fascination with motion itself: the motions or movements of bodies, money, images. The modern woman fits into this circulation in a variety of ways. She becomes both object of exchange and consumer of products. The modern woman's new-found public visibility at the end of the Victorian era alters her relationship to spectacle. Suddenly, women were walking in the street and "steppin' out" on the town.[8] They were joining the work force and attending the cinema in record numbers. During the years leading up to World War II, a signifier of modern woman, whether she was a factory worker, a prostitute, an "American girl," or a dancer, was that her body was in motion.[9]

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[7] The "arbitrary" sign that Crary invokes is taken from Jean Baudrillard's work in *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss (New York, 1983): 84-85. See Crary, 12.

[8] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture: 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

[9] For a consideration of the *flaneur*, or the streetwalking prostitute, see Mary Ann Doane's work in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York:

It should be no surprise that the figure of the woman in motion, particularly the dancing woman, comprised an early and popular subject matter for the technologies of photography and filmmaking.[10] The dancer had already been studied extensively in modernist painting, particularly in Edgar Degas's work where his brush stroke technique, defying the stasis of his materials, suggested the blurry movement of the dancer.[11] Eadweard Muybridge used dancers in his serial photography motion studies to demonstrate how the dancer's body moves while holding veils. His cameras framed the dancer's movement against the modern background of a grid, dissecting his subject's motion while aestheticizing it.[12] Within a few years, Thomas Edison, in one of his early films,

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Routledge Press, 1991).

[10] See my discussion in Chapter Two of early examples of women dancing, exercising, and performing acrobatics in photography and film. See also, Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

[11] Griselda Pollock, *Dealing with Degas: Representations of Women and the Politics of Vision* (New York: Universe, 1992).

[12] Eadweard Muybridge, *The Human Figure in Motion* New York: Bonanza Books, 1989; For a discussion of Muybridge's use of the grid see Maureen Turim, "Designs in Motion: A Correlation Between Early Serial Photography and the Recent Avant Garde," *Enclitic*, VII:2 (Fall 1983): 44-54. See also Marta Braun's work for connections between modernism and the work of Degas, Muybridge, and the important motion studies of Etienne-Jules Marey in *Picturing Time: The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 264-319.

produced "The Serpentine Dance"(1894 or 1895) in his Black Maria studio. The moving image could improve on the photograph by representing the dancer's movements in "real time," abstracting and fragmenting her body into kaleidoscopic designs while maintaining an erotic economy of vision. These new technologies provided the perfect opportunity for creating a spectacle out of the already popular figure of the dancing woman.

I have selected the figure of the woman in motion for my title, rather than the woman dancer, because she suggests that ambiguous distinction between actual gesture and virtual gesture, between moving and dancing, between women and "Woman." I examine a number of representations in film of women in motion between the years of 1900 and 1935. These years encompass approximately the period that Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane take to be the most significant in terms of Modernism, a term that they admit demonstrates much semantic confusion, but that in general seems to include qualities of Impressionism, Symbolism, Futurism, and Expressionism, to name just a few of the significant art and literary movements.[13] Many of the artists during this period either directly interacted with, or at least felt the impact of the careers of the four women in my study. These years also roughly correspond to the period in which, as Hillel

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[13] Bradbury and McFarlane, 19-57.

Schwartz defines it, a new "kinaesthetic" appeared, a new awareness of the moving body and its meanings, as seen in "harmonic gymnastics," modern dance, and film acting styles, that counters the prevailing narrative about the fragmentation of the modernist body.[14] The period in which these women lived is also highly significant because of two other "movements": the women's movement and the first several decades of film history.

The filmic image of the woman as dancer provides a particularly fluid, spectacular, and conflicted trope for representing women during the first several decades of this century. From the the avant-garde status of Loie Fuller's "Fire Dance" to Lillian Gish's modern dance connections, from Louise Brooks's chorus girl background, to the African-American dance style of Josephine Baker, the woman dancer generates multidisciplinary interest. Fuller, Gish, Brooks, and Baker are all dancer/actresses who have numerous connections to art movements, cinema history, musical theater, and modern dance. These women exhibited for numerous critics from the turn-of-the-century through the 1930s one of the more ambigous qualities of modernism--the movement of a body through the new spaces of the new century. The woman in motion appears throughout the first several

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[14] Hillel Schwartz, "Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century," *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, vol.6 (New York: Zone, 1992): 71-127.

decades of this century in writings and films, on theater stages and posters. She is a figure who, like many other performers, embodies those seemingly contradictory impulses that lie at the heart of the spectacle of woman: the collocation of attraction/repulsion, object/subject, being/performing. Through the four women in my study, I focus on the implications of the dancing woman as both spectacular icon and iconic spectacle within the historical context of the first several decades of cinematic representation.

In the four chapters that follow, I consider dance in film to be more than what occurs within a traditional "dance number." In general, I use the term "gesture" to designate a movement of the body that is not intended as performance; likewise, I use the term "dance" to suggest performative movement that can be identified as belonging to a particular dance style. However, I also consider how gesture is coded in ways that suggest the performative or how the movement of a dancer/character within a film further blurs the distinction between moving and dancing. Even when women are not presented as "dancers" within a text, they are framed in ways that suggest the performative.[15] A woman walking down

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[15] See Gaylyn Studlar's article "Douglas Fairbanks: Thief of the Ballets Russes" for a discussion of "dance-like" movement that shares visual similarities to the Ballet Russes. *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, ed. Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (New Jersey: Rutgers Univesity Press, 1995): 107-124.

the aisle of a train in a film is often not merely walking. At what point do her gestures become something more highly coded than an effort to get from point A to point B? How do her movements blur the line between walking and dancing? Is she something more than a spectacle or a representation of masculine desire?

Theorizing Dancing

Dance as a signifying practice has traditionally been ignored and frequently denigrated by philosophers, aestheticians, and film theorists. Within the past several years, however, dance studies has emerged as an important area of cultural and interdisciplinary studies.[16] The recently published *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* includes essays that consider dance on stage, in literature, film, and theory. These essays provide ample evidence for the imaginative possibilities of writing about dance, as well as an explanation for why dance has not been taken seriously sooner, as it is difficult to pin down a

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[16] See the following articles in *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, ed. Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (New Brunswick,NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995): Jacques Derrida and Christie V. McDonald, "Choreographies," 141-156; Felicia McCarren, "Stéphane Mallarmé, Loie Fuller, and the Theater of Femininity," 217-230; Mark Franko, "Mimique," 205-216. See also *Choreographing History*, ed. Susan Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming 1995); Felicia McCarren, "The 'Symptomatic Act' Circa 1900: Hysteria, Hypnosis, Electricity, Dance," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 4, 748-776; Carol J.Clover, "Dancin' in the Rain," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 4, 722-747.

field that crosses so many disciplinary lines. Another obvious reason for the erasure of dance stems from the fact that, as an artform, twentieth century dance is one of the few fields that is dominated by women who participate as both choreographers and performers. Certain dance traditions, such as ballet and Hollywood musicals, maintained a patriarchal and racist division of labor, in which the choreographers were almost always white males and the performers female and/or "ethnic" others.[17] But since the turn of the century and the introduction of modern dance, female and a few non-white choreographers have flourished on stage and in film. Partially as a result of these changes in status, feminist criticism, particularly feminist film criticism, has contributed a great deal to theorizing the body, and recently even more attention has been given to dance.[18]

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[17] The Balanchine tradition is typical of this male choreographer/female dancer split. Of course, there are a number of important exceptions, such as Nijinsky, Fred Astaire, and Gene Kelly, who should not be overlooked. For a discussion of how Hollywood dancers such as Astaire and Kelly appropriated African-American dance vernacular, see Carol Clover's "Dancin' in the Rain." See also Chris Savage-King, "Classical Muscle," *Women's Review*, No.2 (1985): 28-29; Roger Copeland, "Towards a Sexual Politics of Contemporary Dance," *Contact Quarterly*, 7:3/4 (1982): 45-50.

[18] Elizabeth Dempster, "Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances," *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. Susan Sheridan (New York: Verso Press, 1988): 35-54; Lucy Fischer, "Shall We Dance?" in *Shot/Countershot: Film Tradition and Women's Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley:

Francis Sparshott claims that dance has been trivialized within the field of philosophy because of the ephemeral nature of the choreographic sign.[19] The nonverbal status of the dance sign accounts for the difficulty of notating dance. Even music has a standard notation form, although its status also suffers because its forms of expression are primarily nonverbal.[20] Sparshott admits that dance carries the taint of the historically eroticized body of the dancer. Curiously, he denies the fact that dance is excluded from the status of the "fine arts," because it is considered a "female art." He admits, however, that

> there are contexts when one thinks of a female dancer in a short white skirt. That is, one identifies artistic dance with nineteenth-century ballet and with dance forms derived from that, and then personifies that form as a 'ballerina.' One might then think of dance as being at once feminine and fleshly in a derogatory way (because the short tutu functions at least in part to satisfy the voyeurs in the audience) and, hence, as

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University of California Press, 1986); Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music, Television, and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Judith Lynne Hanna, *Dance, Sex, Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[19] Francis Sparshott, *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988): 3-33.

[20] See Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1992); Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.

> artistically trivial, because that stereotyped image of the girl under a spotlight at the focus of the opera glasses is kitsch.[21]

Sparshott examines more than just the Western tradition of dance, so his conclusions about the relative equality of male and female dancers is more pertinent to non-Western cultural practices. Nevertheless, he claims that "dances for women are no more common than dances for men and dances for both sexes together." I tend to disagree; dance's denigration has everything to do with gender.

In philosophical thought and popular criticism, dance is most often discussed in one of two ways: first, dance is considered at the level of form and the dancer is judged by the competency of her technique; or, second, dance is interpreted through the generalized emotional states it seems to represent. As Susanne Langer has demonstrated, out of all art forms, dance in particular has critics that conflate "*imagined feeling*" with "real emotional conditions."[22] Dancers, choreographers and critics all seem to repeat the same mistake, confusing "actual" gestures with performative ones by assuming a transparency of emotion from dancer to expressed movement. A similar point of contention exists in

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[21] Sparshott, 13.

[22] Susanne K. Langer, "Virtual Powers" in *What is Dance? Readings in Theory and Criticism*, ed. Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983): 31.

discussions about acting style.[23] Is the actor *really* experiencing the emotion she portrays? Or is she performing, miming, or parodying emotion? Langer emphasizes that what distinguishes dance as an "art," what gives dance its "power," is that movement is self-consciously illusory. When critics do not recognize the difference between being and performing, she concludes, they set up a situation where dance is first praised, but then later condemned *because* of its close association with emotional expression. The inability to separate from emotions is one quality that Andreas Huyssen identifies with the denigration of mass culture and its associations with the feminine.[24] According to Huyssen, the proponents of modernism attempt to separate themselves from mass culture and the feminine by maintaining a critical distance. Dance's apparent proximity to the expression of emotion accounts in part for both its "feminine" status and its exclusion from discussions about modernism.

In order to consider gesture and dance in film from an historical, semiotic perspective, I will return to some early, but important articles in film studies, particularly

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[23] See James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[24] Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modeleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 188-207.

Roland Barthes's work in *Image Music Text*.[25] Barthes theorizes in "The Photographic Message" and "The Rhetoric of the Image" that, from the moment of perception, the meaning of an image is already "verbalized." An image of a body, then, is not fully perceived until the word "body" is brought into the mind of the viewer or, to use Peirce's term, into the mind of the *interpretant*.[26] Immediately upon perception this body might, through what Barthes defines as "cognitive connotation," be recognized through details, such as leotards, tights, and bodily designs, as a "dancer." The rhetoric of an image, for Barthes, depends on the codes that define how individual elements of the photograph are brought together, as in his example of the Panzani advertisement in which tomatoes, onions, mushrooms, and the label "Panzani" connote the signified "Italianicity."[27] Depending on an interpretant's knowledge and history of how various signs connotes certain dance styles, an image of a dancer could then be identified as "ballet dancer," "modern dancer" or "vaudeville dancer." The work of both Barthes and Peirce also implies that interpretations will vary, depending on the

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[25] Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977).

[26] Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vols. 1-8 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958), vol. 5, paragraph no. 475.

[27] Barthes, 33.

historical, cultural, sexual, and racial experience of the reader/viewer.[28]

In recent years semiotics has started to think through the implications of the nonverbal status of gesture and dance as they function within various texts, although less often with reference to the question of sexual difference. Peter Brooks, for example, in *The Melodramatic Imagination* provides a helpful analysis of gesture in melodrama, which easily applies to dance as well. In the chapter "The Text of Muteness," Brooks writes that the "excess" created by the ambiguous relation of the gestural sign to its signified is marked "by a kind of fault or gap in the code, the space that marks its inadequacies to convey a full freight of emotional meaning. In the silence of this gap, the language of presence and immediacy, the primal language is born anew."[29] By taking the example of "muteness" in melodr*ama* (moments of emotional excess that can only be described in terms of gesture, facial expression, or the "ineffable"), Brooks hopes to clear a space for understanding the nonverbal sign.

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[28] For other work that begins from Peirce and then delineates a sexually specific reader see Teresa De Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); For a revision of De Lauretis's model that includes the racially different reader, see Mark A. Reid's *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[29] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985): 67.

However, he idealizes the "ineffability" of gesture by concluding that it refers to a more primal, immediate, and unified means of emotional communication that can never be recovered. Muteness, gesture, emotionalism, primitivism, and immediacy are all qualities that are also associated with the "feminine." To assume that gesture (and consequently dance) cannot "speak" is to reposition dance in the marginalized space of feminine silence.

But how specifically does the viewer of gesture and dance in film, recognize what they are seeing and place it within their own or another historical context? When Brooks discusses the "gestural sign" of the melodramatic text, he refers to the work of A.J. Greimas on the semiotics of gesture. Greimas's work involves an examination of "the relation between a sequence of gestural figures, taken as the signifier, and the gestural project, considered as the signified."[30] Greimas's "gestural project" appears to be a more specific way of mapping the signifieds of gesture, because it allows for intertextual connections. Another writer who refers to both Brooks and Greimas in a reading of gesture is Roberta Pearson in her important recent book, *Eloquent Gestures*.[31] Pearson also uses Greimas to set up an

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[30] Brooks, 70.

[31] Roberta Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films*. Pearson compares the changes in gestural style in Griffith films between 1908 and 1913 with exercises developed

intertextual reading strategy for interpreting gestural differences in the melodramatic film texts of D.W. Griffith. Pearson does not elaborate on the specifics of Greimas's gestural project, even though she quite skillfully carries out the type of reading model which he proposes. I wish to fill in a few of the gaps about how this reading model for gesture and dance might work.

In "Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts," Greimas outlines a possible analytic approach to the plastic arts, specifically painting. He begins by establishing that in order for viewers to read a painting, they inevitably apply a "reading grid" to the object:

> It is this grid through which we read which causes the world to signify for us and it does so by allowing us to identify figures as objects, to classify them and link them together, to interpret movements as processes which are attributable or not attributable to subjects, and so on. This grid is of a semantic nature, not visual, auditive, or olfactory. It serves as a "code" for recognition which makes the world intelligible and manageable. Now we see that it is the projection of this reading grid--a sort of "signified" of the world--onto a painted canvas that allows us to recognize the spectacle it is supposed to represent.[32]

The code through which we identify figures or, in this case, gestures or dance movements, results from our experience in

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by the followers of physical culturalist, Francois Delsarte. (I will discuss this model and my problems with it in Chapter Three).

[32] A.J. Greimas, "Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts", *New Literary History* 20:3 (Spring 1989), 632.

the world. The "'signified' of the world," then, will depend to some degree on our historical context as much as on our own particular interaction within that context. Greimas acknowledges that his reading grid is related to Barthes's concept of "iconicity" in the "Rhetoric of the Image."[33] The important difference is Greimas's addition of the grid to theorize *how* signifiers are brought together in a type of cognitive architecture.

Here, then, we have a starting point for reading gesture as semantic coding. The reader of gestural signs perceives and cognitively organizes gestures through a grid that provides culturally and historically specific referents. For example, the movements of Loie Fuller's body and costume in her film *Fire Dance* (1906) relates (both in terms of iconicity and semantic coding) to photographs of Fuller skirt dancing, the swirling designs of her Art Nouveau representations, and the Futurist texts that document a fascination with Fuller, electricity, and disappearing bodies. By the same token, we could extend the idea of the reading grid to include the many photographic and filmic examples of dancers other than Fuller who were also veiled in translucent material and moved in iconically similar ways, as well as reviews and interpretations about the filmic

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[33] Greimas, 635; See also Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977).

representation of the dancer. Greimas's reading grid allows for both depth and ambiguity in interpreting gesture. Each individual reader could construct an entirely different reading grid. My project is to try and construct or, in some ways, to reconstruct a reading grid that includes information about dance, gesture, and women in motion from the period between 1900 and 1935.

Another approach from film studies that in many ways follows an interpretive strategy similar to Greimas's is star studies. The best of these studies considers the relationship between stars and a sexually and racially specific and historicized spectator.[34] Christine Gledhill describes the interdisciplinary challenge of the star text in ways that resonate with Greimas's reading strategy of interpreting the "signified of the world":

> A product of mass culture, but retaining theatrical concerns with acting, performance and art; an industrial marketing device, but a signifying element in films; a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which expresses the intimacies of individual personality, inviting desire and identification; an emblem of national celebrity, founded on the body, fashion and personal style; a product of capitalism and the ideology of individualism, yet a site of contest by marginalised groups; a figure consumed for his or her personal life, who competes for

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[34] See Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, 1979); Christine Gledhill, ed., *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (New York: Routledge Press, 1991); Shari Roberts, *Seeing Stars: Feminine Spectacle, Female Spectators, and World War II Hollywood Musicals* (Dissertation: University of Chicago, 1993).

allegiance with statesmen and politicians.[35] Gledhill's description parallels in certain ways the historicized semiotic approach that I take from Greimas's notion of the "gestural project" and "reading grid." She mentions many issues that are also raised through the four "stars" upon which this project focuses, Loie Fuller, Lillian Gish, Louise Brooks, and Josephine Baker. For each I apply a reading grid that considers the gestural as a social sign that draws its iconography from art movements, actors' manuals, modern dance culture, autobiography, photography and film, and cultural theory. My study, similar to many "star studies," considers the importance of the interpellated and sexually differentiated spectator as reader of these signs.[36]

Before I further outline my chapters, I will briefly describe the various ways that film studies has analyzed the signifier of the woman in motion, particularly the figure of the woman dancer. Brooks's argument about the emotional excess of gestural signs replicates many earlier discussions from film criticism. Robin Woods, for example, in "Art and Ideology: Notes on *Silk Stockings*," discusses "the film's supreme expression of vitality through physical movement" without ever mentioning the politics of sexual difference in the film. His conclusions, while thoughtful, demonstrate an

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[35] Gledhill, xiii.

[36] I do not discuss in much detail a racially different spectator until Chapter Five's analysis of Josephine Baker.

uncritical and somewhat nostalgic approach to the figure of woman as dancer that reflects the tendency to read the signified of dance as excessive, feminized emotion.[37] Marcia Butzel acknowledges another difficulty with Woods's reading of *Silk Stockings* in that, similar to many other analyses of dance numbers, his analysis "rest[s] on an untenable paradox: the dance sequence's definition (as a massive rhetorical figure) depends on its separability from the narrative; yet its significance depends on the way it develops the narrative."[38]

In order to explain this paradox, other critics have attempted to theorize more specifically how the excessive nature of movement and dance functions in relation to the narrative. Moments of excess could indeed be the one means for escaping the dominant ideology of the Hollywood narrative. Jean-Francois Lyotard in "Acinema" has argued that cinematic movement generally functions within a narrative economy that orients all movement in relation to a system of value and exchange. However, he does concede that certain types of movement, in particular, moments of "immobility and excessive movement" work in avant-garde films

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[37] Robin Wood, "Art and Ideology: Notes on *Silk Stockings*," *Film Comment* 11:3 (May-June 1975): 65.

[38] Marcia Butzel, *Movement as Cinematic Narration: The Concept of Practice and Choreography in Film*, Diss. Univ. of Iowa, 1985, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 8518810, 1985): 200.

to disrupt the economy of the Hollywood narrative.[39] Tom Gunning also formulates a thesis about the disruptive potential of the "exhibitionism" of early cinema, which includes dance performance, and compares the confrontational and excessive quality of early cinema to similar qualities advocated by certain avant-garde filmmakers.[40] Describing the dancing or gestural signifier as "excessive" or "exhibitionist," however, still does not establish how dance signifies, or how and in what ways these signifiers are perceived and interpreted.

Richard Dyer's article, "Entertainment and Utopia," offers an interpretation of dance in film that allows for both sexual difference and historical specificity. Dyer questions the emotionalism associated with moments of excess and spectacle in the Hollywood musical. He argues that one might interpret a dance scene by the "utopianism [sic] contained in the feeling it embodies--feelings which correspond to the 'oomph,' 'pow,' 'bezazz' qualities of the dance performance."[41] Following Barthes, Dyer feels that it

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[39] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Acinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 349-359.

[40] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8: 3-4 (1986): 63-70.

[41] Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Movies and Methods, Vol.II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 220-232.

is important to investigate the codes of these emotions just as we investigate emotional signs. This would mean placing these codes within the "complex of meanings in the socio-cultural situation in which they are produced." By recognizing the importance of context in relation to the codes of emotion (if we accept that emotion can be coded) and by extension, the codes of dance or gesture, we can begin to critique those theories of excess, such as Brooks', that rely on mystifying notions of "primal communication." What should not be forgotten with Brooks is the connection of excess (and the emotional responses to it), to certain theories of nostalgia and utopianism. As Dyer points out, nostalgia and utopia are historically specific phenomena. With Dyer, then, we see the beginnings of a theory of nonverbal signs (such as dance or music) that includes a consideration of the histories that embody expressions of emotion. A chorus line of women on stage gains significance not only because of its own symmetrical logic and relationship to the narrative, but also because of its relationship to the historical contexts of burlesque and vaudeville and to fantasies of utopian community.

If dance and gesture as excessive signs possess the potential to disrupt the narrative, then why has dance not been considered more seriously for its radical potential? The obvious answer to this question involves the relationship of dance to female spectacle. Feminist film criticism has

handled the question of spectacle and its relation to the female body in a number of compelling and sometimes contradictory ways. One of the earliest and most influential theories is Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."[42] Mulvey, using a psychoanalytic framework, contends that the role of the female body operates primarily as spectacle in order to fetishistically reveal/conceal the female's lack. Significantly, Mulvey uses the Ziegfeld showgirl as one example of how the female body functions to interrupt the narrative but never to participate actively as a subject within it. The visual pleasure that the spectacle of woman initiates is seen by Mulvey to be completely subsumed within a phallocratic economy and consequently anti-feminist. Mulvey states that this type of visual pleasure must be destroyed in order to represent women's desires as something other than the object of fetishistic voyeurism. Her argument, however, leaves little room for theorizing the female body on film as visually pleasurable.

Many other feminist film critics have taken up the problem of the opposition between essentialist and anti-essentialist theories of the female body in film.[43]

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[42] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge Press, 1988): 69-79.

[43] See *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, Linda Williams (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984); *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York:

Essentialist arguments tend to seek out "positive" representations of "woman" without necessarily thinking through the masculinist implications built into the apparatus itself. These arguments run the risk of naturalizing "femininity" and thereby repeating the same patterns as the patriarchal domination of sexual difference. Anti-essentialist arguments such as Mulvey's, while providing an insightful description of "woman" in relation to narrative and the apparatus, seem totalizing in their very negativity, leaving no possibility for a positive or autonomous representation of "femininity" or "woman."

A number of feminists have already begun to think through the essentialist/anti-essentialist debate by reexamining some psychoanalytic tenets that do not take into account the difference of the female body. Mary Ann Doane in "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body" argues that in order to "move beyond the opposition between essentialism and anti-essentialism" we must take "the necessary risk" and "construct a feminine specificity (not essence)" in relation to language. The "stake" that Doane describes relates to the "syntax which constitutes the female body as a term."[44] The

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Routledge Press, 1988).

[44] Mary Ann Doane, "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge Press, 1988), 226. See also in the same collection, Joan Copjec's "*India Song/Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta Desert*: The Compulsion to Repeat": 229-243. Copjec and Doane both refer to the sexually specific metaphors used

writings of Luce Irigaray also unravel a notion of gendered "syntax," both in how she deconstructs the metaphors of femininity in philosophy and psychoanalysis, and in the very structure of her sentences.[45] Irigaray refers to dance as an example of how the "feminine" speaks with a different syntax.[46]

Several important articles in film studies consider more specifically the role of the dancer in film, most often in the Hollywood musical. Lucy Fischer's "Shall We Dance?" analyzes the role of Busby Berkeley's choreography in the construction of the chorus dancer in Hollywood film. She points to Berkeley's work in *Dames* (1934) as indicative of Hollywood's dependence on certain "types," such as the "blonde bombshell" or the "femme fatale." She argues that "these are not 'career' specifications, as are the masculine labels of 'gangster' or 'cowboy,' but rather categories of

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in the process of *anaclisis* as a weak link in the apparatus (cinematic and psychoanalytic) that "leans" on the metaphoric construct of the body.

[45] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press,).

[46] In her article "The gesture in psychoanalysis," Irigaray suggests that women enter language differently from men. For example, "If they are too overcome by mourning, they do not enter language at all . . . they make their entry by producing a space, a track, a river, a dance, a rhythm, a song," 133. Luce Irigaray, "The gesture in psychoanalysis," *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis*,ed. Teresa Brennan (New York: Routledge Press, 1984).

sexual proclivity and physical demeanor."[47] Signifiers, including gestural ones, function within the codes of certain stereotypes about woman as spectacle and certainly relate to my understanding of the iconic nature of the woman in motion. Even more specifically than Fischer, Maureen Turim notices in "Gentlemen Consume Blondes" how Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell "maneuver their bodies in a perfectly matched and coordinated assault" in the dance numbers of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Howard Hawks, 1953). Turim argues for a reading that reflects the contradictory nature of spectacle. She points out that while Monroe and Russell are obviously objectified, they also exhibit a competency and "cleverness" that "provides the ambiguity which is essential to the ambiance of the sophisticated tease." In a later "Addendum" Turim suggests that dance movements need to be investigated according to some "very abstract psycho-perceptual concepts about the appeal of symmetry, rhyming and patterning within a visual field" along with "historical analysis" about relationships between women, particularly lesbian and "pseudo-lesbian" ones.[48]

My approach to the dancer as spectacle in film will start from these insights about the "ambiguity" of spectacle

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[47] Fischer, 137.

[48] Maureen Turim, "Gentlemen Consume Blondes," *Movies and Methods,* Vol. II, ed. Bill Nichols, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 369-378.

and the potentially disruptive syntax of the dancing female body that remains sexually and historically specific without being "essentially" female. I do not mean to suggest that the figure of the woman in motion is always disruptive. Particularly within the historical parameters of early twentieth century performance, the figure of the dancing woman functions as spectacle in both positive and negative ways. From the very beginnings of film the body of the dancer was a part of a male-oriented scopophilic economy. But I also see moments during this period (1900-1935) when dance is represented as a kind of visual pleasure that is initiated, performed, and received by women. It is linked to other cultural movements, such as the suffrage and the physical culture movements. Unfortunately, Mulvey's assessment of the woman as spectacle seems to hold true for much of early cinematic representation. Part of the project for feminist film criticism, however, has been to recover those seemingly marginal moments that history erased in order to reaffirm the sense that the consumption of these images was never a monolithic or simple process.

The four women in motion that I chose to analyze all have some background in dance training, all appeared in film, and all were Americans as famous in Europe as in their own country. Their filmic appearances span the years of 1906 to 1935, a period that is significant for a number of reasons. First, these years cover primarily silent film; all of the

films I examine, except for Josephine Baker's *Princess Tam Tam* (1935), are silent and depend heavily on non-verbal forms of communication. During this same period, the suffrage movement experienced its greatest success in gaining the vote for women, and, by the mid-twenties, had already begun a period of decline.[49] Women, no matter how they felt about feminist culture, became more "public" during this time than ever before. They joined the work force, women's clubs, and gymnasiums. The Flapper replaced the more wholesome American Girl type and was instantly commodified by Hollywood and the popular press.[50] The figure of the woman became one of the organizing archetypes for both modernist and avant-garde art circles.[51] And as the forces that resulted in World War II exerted more pressure, all of the previously mentioned areas

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[49] See William Chafe's *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972): 7-30.

[50] See Banta's *Imaging American Women* and Sumiko Higashi, *Virgins, Vamps and Flappers: The American Silent Movie Heroine* (Montreal: Eden Press Women's Publications, 1978).

[51] For a discussion of the distinction between modernist and avant-garde art and the historical split between them that occurred during the 1920s see my discussion in Chapter Two. See also the "Introduction" to *Modernity and Mass Culture*, ed. James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991): 1-23; Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

became tinged with questions of nationalism and racism.[52] These various histories will weave in and out of my analysis of the woman in motion.

In the second chapter, "Telling Motions: Loie Fuller and the 'interpenetration' of art and science," I read Fuller's 1906 film *Fire Dance* through a reading grid that crosses many disciplinary boundaries. The grid I construct includes images and ideas from figures such as the photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, the Futurist, Filippo Tommasso Marinetti, physical culturalist, Francois Delsarte, dancers and dance critics, such as Rudolf Laban and John Martin, and cultural theorists, such as Walter Benjamin. Their observations span the years from the turn of the century to the mid-thirties, and their perspectives on movement and modernism provide an important backdrop for my entire thesis. In every area I investigate in this chapter, I uncover an early modernist belief that motions could "tell" or reveal knowledge about the body. I question how this "telling" is often figured as the result of what Delsarte described as the "interpenetration" of art and science. The writers in this study metaphorically transform the "artistic" into the "feminine," the "scientific" into the "masculine," and their

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[52] See T.J. Jackson Lear's discussion of how fear of physical superiority of the immigrant population during the teens resulted in formation of WASP-only workout clubs. *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

reproductive offspring into the icon of Modernity--a girl-child who fuses in her filmic motion sexuality and technology. Loie Fuller's *Fire Dance* provides the filter for my reading grid that focuses on the conflicted representation of the woman dancer.

Chapter Three, "Expressionistic Gestures: Lillian Gish and the Impact of Modern Dance in *The Wind*," investigates the semiotics of filmic gesture and dance in Victor Seastrom's *The Wind* (1928). I challenge the prevailing historical view of film acting that projects an overly linear development from the "histrionic" or "melodramatic" style of early cinema to the more "realist" style of classical Hollywood.[53] I argue for a use of the term *expressionistic gesture* to describe a gestural style that is neither simply histrionic nor realist and is marked by its similarity to modern dance techniques. Numerous actresses, Gish among them, studied modern dance as a part of their training for film acting. Expressionistic gesture appears in certain American and German films of the twenties. I also suggest a link between expressionism, modern dance and the physical culture movement during the twenties, a connection which provides a reading grid for Gish's performance in *The Wind*.

"Expressionistic Gestures" also pursues the links between physical culture and nationalism during this period.

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[53] I take this terminology from Pearson's *Eloquent Gestures*. See Chapter Two.

Numerous modern dancers invoked rhetoric in both writings and choice of dance theme that signified "American." Character choices portraying Native Americans, Shakers, and pioneer women were as popular in modern dance as they were in film. In *The Wind* Gish portrays a pioneer woman trying to make it on the edge of a threatening desert landscape. Her body is tossed back and forth across the screen by the ever present but never visible force of the wind. The film establishes a metaphor for the intersection of technology, the American frontier, and the woman's body that attempts to negotiate this uncomfortable crossing. This intersection materializes in the expressionistic and dance-like quality of Gish's bodily movement.

Chapter Four is entitled "The American Chorus Girl in Weimar Germany: Louise Brooks, *Pandora's Box*, and Kracauer's 'The Mass Ornament.'" It considers the chorus girl as embodied by Louise Brooks in George W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1928) and as theorized by Siegfried Kracauer in "The Mass Ornament" (1927). Both Brooks's persona and Kracauer's use of the Tiller Girls bring the figure of the American into the Weimar context.[54] This chapter questions the implications of these trans-cultural texts that frequently connect the

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[54] Kracauer mistakenly describes the Tiller Girls as American. They started in Britain and travelled around the world forming schools of 'high-kickers'. See Derek and Julia Parker's *The Natural History of the Chorus Girl* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975).

iconicity of American culture to the patterns and designs of the American chorus girl. Brooks's background as modern dancer, Ziegfeld girl, and Flapper provide a provocative reading grid for *Pandora's Box*. Her performance in the film also challenges a completely negative reading of chorus girl as spectacle. In "The Mass Ornament" Kracauer suggests that the chorus line demonstrates a radical *demythologizing* potential because of its iconographic resemblance to the design and movements of the factory line. In this chapter I argue that Pabst's framing of Brooks's movements exemplify in another form the radical potential of the American chorus girl.

In Chapter 5, "Uncanny Performances in Colonial Narratives: Josephine Baker in *Princess Tam Tam*," I look at a performer who shares much in common with Loie Fuller. Like Fuller, Baker is another American performer who achieved her fame first as a dancer in Paris and subsequently became the toast of the Parisian art and entertainment worlds. Baker's star persona was frequently associated with her racial difference, but this "difference" undergoes a transformation that subsumes her "Americanicity" to her "Africanicity."[55] The mise-en-scéne of both her stage performances and her performance in *Princess Tam Tam* (Edmond T. Greville, 1935)

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[55] I refer here to Barthes's notion of the iconicity of the image, specifically his use of the term "Italianicity" as signified in the filmic image in "Rhetoric of the Image".

often associates her dancing with French "colonial" settings, such as Tunisia. Following the theoretical work of Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, and bell hooks, this chapter investigates the inherent instability of the ethnic stereotype in colonial narratives as realized in the performance of Baker in *Princess Tam Tam*. Using Freud's description of the *unheimlich*, I argue that Baker's dancing sets off a signifying chain that unsettles the white colonial gaze, reminding the colonist that he is, in fact, disembodied and *not-at-home*.

I turn now to this consideration of the woman in motion within various historical texts between the turn-of-the-century and World War II. The spectacular nature of this figure's performances reflect the contradictory desires involved in representing the woman in motion as an icon for the modern age. From these contradictions moments of identification emerge that offer the possibility for a more progressive kind of feminine "syntax," for another way of speaking feminine difference.

CHAPTER 2
'TELLING' MOTIONS: LOIE FULLER AND THE 'INTERPENETRATION OF ART AND SCIENCE'

> I explain to myself the great success of Loie Fuller by the feeling she gives visions of the infinite. . . . She is not a woman of flesh and bone and brown hair. She is an apparition equal to those ideal creatures that one perceives, restless, seductive and unreal in the paintings of Mantegna. . . . One's eyes follow Loie Fuller who undulates and turns like a dervish, as a child follows from afar the slow flight of the dragonfly, whose iridescent wings have exactly the changing reflections of the robe of the American.[1]
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> One must go beyond muscular possibilities and aim in the dance for that ideal *multiplied body* of the motor that we have so long dreamed of. One must imitate the movements of machines with gestures; pay assiduous court to steering wheels, ordinary wheels, pistons, thereby preparing the fusion of man with the machine, to achieve the metallicity of the Futurist dance.[2]

In 1917 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote in the "Manifesto of the Futurist Dance" that "we Futurists prefer Loie Fuller and the 'cakewalk' of the Negroes" because of

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[1] M. Rastignac review, "Courriere de Paris," in *L'Illustration* (Jan. 30, 1893). As quoted in Margaret Haile Harris, *Loie Fuller: Magician of Light, Exhibition at the Virginia Museum, March 12-April 22 1979* (Richmond,VA: The Virginia Museum, 1979), 26.

[2] F.T. Marinetti, *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. R.W. Flint, trans. R.W. Flint and Arthur Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 138.

their "utilization of electric light and mechanisms."[3] While the aesthetics of either Loie Fuller or the "cakewalk" may seem a surprising favorite of the Futurists, Fuller's popularity with both Art Nouveau and Futurism indicates the fluid nature of her representation. Fuller transcended national lines as easily as art movements, travelling from the United States to Europe, encountering the most respected artists and thinkers of the turn-of-the-century. With "500 yards" of silky dress swirling around her body with the aid of bamboo poles, Fuller created a public sensation by using colored electric lights to silhouette her body. She performed "with her troupe of ladies and corps of electrical engineers" dances such as "The Firmament, The Fire, The Great White Lily" on the same program with "her newest scientific creation, Radium Dance."[4]

The transformation of the woman's body into flowers, butterflies, and dragonflies, particularly Fuller's body, was a favorite subject for the Art Nouveau movement of the turn-of-the-century. According to Martin Battersby, Fuller "personified what artists felt about Woman as an abstraction--

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[3] Marinetti, 138.

[4] New York Public Library Dance Collection, Lincoln Center. Program notes for Fuller performance in Keil, Germany.

a vague, tantalising, ethereal vison."[5] From a different perspective, but with similar conclusions, Marinetti's description of Fuller's choreography transformed her into the "ideal *multiplied body*" of the Futurist dance, the incarnation of "metallicity," and a vision of motion wherein the body disappears.[6] How does Fuller encompass both movements, the first that was so oriented towards the consumption of the female image embodied in lamps, jewelry, and furniture, and the second that depicted the female body through metaphors of machinery and invisibility? The answer lies in what both movements appropriated from Fuller's figure: the unusual way in which her bodily motion expressed a *modern* femininity.

Fuller's many transformations reveal the complexity of representations of women in motion during the period between 1890 and 1920 as well as the wide-ranging nature of early modernism. A Fuller program combining a butterfly dance with a dance about radium could only make aesthetic sense within the performance context of the first several decades of this century. What, then, do the many interpretations of Fuller's

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[5] Martin Battersby, *The World of Art Nouveau* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968): 164-165.

[6] See Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Perloff considers Futurism as an international movement and includes French and British artists along with the Italians and Russians during the period before World War I. See also Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: Dutton, 1971).

performance style during this period suggest specifically about the woman in motion and particularly about the codes of modern femininity? Is she, as Rastignac describes, "not a woman of flesh and bone" but an "apparition?" Does her use of electricity and mirrors embody the "metallicity of the Futurist dance?" Or is she, as in the words of Stéphane Mallarmé, "the performer who illustrates many spinning themes from which extends a distant fading warp . . . ?"[7]

Loie Fuller's short film, *Fire Dance* (1906) offers an unusual performance, which involved the disappearance of the female body rather than the more typical vaudeville code of striptease dancing. Did her disappearance actually reveal something else about early Twentieth Century visual culture? By using the film as a type of filter, I constructed a grid of information that provides answers, but also new questions about the culture that created the piece. The "information" I selected consists of both images and textual comment and emanates from a variety of sources. First, I examine closely the belief held by critics of film and dance that the application of film to the moving body (frequently female) reveals a knowledge about the body (and the gender) that could not previously be seen. Most of these critics were

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[7] Felicia McCarren, "Stéphane Mallarmé, Loie Fuller, and the Theater of Femininity," *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, ed. Ellen W. Goellner an Jacqueline Shea Murphy (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995): 217-230.

writing in the thirties at the end of the silent film period, at a time when criticism from a variety of disciplines explored the affinities between film and bodily movement. Many of these writers, such as Walter Benjamin and Rudolf Laban, published before the complete takeover of sound film and thus concentrated particularly on the relationships between the body, movement, and the camera. These critics were not writing out of a cultural and historical void. From the turn-of-the-century through the Thirties, women participated in leisure activities and the work force in very visible ways. Also during this period, the physical culture and modern dance movements made their biggest impressions both on the public and on representations of bodies exerting force and expressing emotion.

A number of recent works helped to define the parameters of this reading grid by considering the relationship between emerging technologies, the woman's body, and modernism. In "The Cinema of Attractions" Tom Gunning explores the exhibitionist quality of early cinema and its connections to both vaudeville and the avant-garde.[8] Miriam Hansen discusses in *Babel and Babylon* how the spectacle of early cinema, which frequently involved the spectacle of a woman in motion (dancers, acrobats, pornographic performers), provided an excess of visual distractions, a defining marker of early

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[8] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions," *Wide Angle* 8.3-4 (1986): 63-70.

modernist spectatorship.[9] In "'when the direction of the force acting on the body is changed; The Moving Image,'" Mary Ann Doane considers the body of the prostitute in relation to early technologies of movement, such as the train and the cinema, and how these new technologies altered the spatial and economic deployment of the woman's body.[10] Griselda Pollock also considers artistic representations of the *flaneur* and the dancer in the public sphere in "Modernity and the spaces of femininity."[11] All of these writers draw somewhat different conclusions about the relationship between spectacle and new forms of knowledge about the body in the midst of the "modern" condition; most necessarily comment on the complicated interrelationship between vision, bodies, and codes of femininity.[12]

Other recent books review historical materials that document the important shift that occurred around the turn-of-the-century in the representation of women and their new

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[9] Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard Univesity Press, 1991):23-59.

[10] Mary Ann Doane, "'. . . when the direction of the forct acting on the body is changed:' the Moving Image" *Wide Angle* 7.1-2 (1985): 42-58.

[11] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[12] See Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

participation in work and leisure activities. Martha Banta covers the iconography of women in literature, photography, and popular journals up to 1910 and tracks the transformation of the Victorian ideal into a number of modern "types," which include images of women in motion.[13] Kathy Peiss charts the increasing participation of working class white women in dance hall culture and at movie theaters throughout New York City.[14] Both books cite numerous examples of women in motion: women dancing, women walking, women working in ways that signified how modernity was transforming representations of femininity.

An important part of my reading grid includes a brief history of physical culture and its obsession with measuring bodies in motion, along with a consideration of early film's reflection of physical culture. The physical culture movement helps to explain why the technologies of photography and film were early on perceived as a quasi-legitimate means of enacting the "interpenetration" of art and science, particularly through the body of woman. This representational enactment served as an ambiguous catalyst

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[13] Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

[14] Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). See also Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture: 1890-1930* (Westport,CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

for "scientific" studies of the body, for pornography, for art, and for more popular documentation of women swimming, dancing, and exercising.

Finally, the reading grid pursues Fuller's own career and her relationship to the Art Nouveau and Futurist movements. Artists from both movements appreciated Fuller's modernism and appropriated her figure in ways that reflect their interest in both her aesthetic and scientific connotations. All of these ideas seemed necessary to construct my reading grid for Fuller's film *Fire Dance*(1906). While the idea of a grid may sound rigid, its structure allows me to work through material in ways that I hope are as fluid and as compelling as my subject matter. I do not wish to suggest that this grid is a complete one. Nor would I deny that other information could change my interpretation of *Fire Dance*. The application of a reading grid does more than simply provide "background" to my text; it acts as a filter or lens and necessarily alters what goes through it. My reading of *Fire Dance* and Loie Fuller is thus a wholly motivated one that focuses on the nature of her femininity, the quality of her movement, and a culture's reaction to both.

The various descriptions of Fuller's work by Rastignac, Marinetti, and Mallarmé together indicate a crisis of codes defining the parameters of femininity during the early part of this century. Alice Jardine has defined *gynesis* as the

"process" of "the putting into discourse of 'woman,'" a process which Jardine argues is "intrinsic to the condition of modernity." Representations of Fuller's image fit accordingly into this "process" which first appropriates the feminine and her "historical connotations" and then introduces her into the new forms and technologies of modernism.[15] The appropriation of the image of woman as a *representative* of modernism should therefore be treated carefully. Masculine creativity has historically appropriated feminine qualities as a primary source of inspiration.[16] Jardine's conception of gynesis, though, also carries with it the potential for a radical reappraisal of the feminine in the modern context. Fuller's performances, I believe, demonstrate the double-edged nature of a woman's attempts to redefine feminine movement through early modern technologies.

Mallarmé's writings on dance provide an exceptional appropriation of Fuller's work, one that suggests the more radical potential of gynesis. Felicia McCarren's work on Mallarmé's "Crayonne au theatre" explores the "theater of femininity" that Mallarmé elusively weaves between the dancer and the poet/spectator in his "sketches" on the ballet and

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[15] Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 25.

[16] See Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

other performers.[17] For McCarren, Mallarmé's writing suggests that Fuller's "dance allows to be seen not emptiness or lack, but the 'nothing' which Mallarmé locates at the heart of theater" and, consequently, of femininity.[18] By suggesting that Fuller's type of feminine performance obliterates sexuality while maintaining sexual difference, Mallarmé abstracts the feminine without essentializing it. Fuller's dancing, then, stages something other than what psychoanalytic film theory might describe as the spectacle of woman's lack.[19] Her performance embodies a nothingness that, for Mallarmé, composes the "*ideal*" theater, a feminine theater, a theater of movement.

Fuller's theater of movement is best understood within the context of turn-of-the-century attitudes towards the arts and sciences. In this chapter I explore the belief that Loie Fuller's dance performances embodied the intersection, or, in the words of the Nineteenth Century movement theorist Francois Delsarte, the "interpenetration" of the arts and sciences, and, by extension, the "interpenetration" of both

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[17] McCarren, 217-227. See also Mark Franko, "Mimique," *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995): 205-216.

[18] McCarren, 227.

[19] See Laura Mulvey's argument and subsequent revisions of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Feminism and Film Theory* (New York: Routledge Press, 1988): 69-79.

feminine and masculine codes of performance.[20] As Jonathan Crary argues in *Techniques of the Observer*, "rather than stressing the separation between art and science in the nineteenth century, it is important to see how they were both part of a single interlocking field of knowledge and practice."[21] Crary's "field," I believe, extends to include "knowledge" about sexual difference represented in new technologies of vision. Fuller, for example, promoted dance pieces, such as her "Radium Dance," by enhancing the very modern-sounding title with her innovative use of electronic stage lighting.[22] Fuller's use of colored electric lights on her own body aestheticized the scientific novelty of electricity and associated her figure with modernism. In 1906 she employed another new technology when she starred in the hand-tinted film of her "Fire Dance."

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[20] See Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte's System of Expression* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1977); Marion Lowell, *Harmonic Gymnastics and Pantomimic Expression* (Boston, 1894); Ted Shawn, *Every Little Movement: A Book About Francois Delsarte* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1910).

[21] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 9.

[22] Her patented lighting inventions preceded the experiments of the Futurist Appia by several years. See video with Sally Sommer and Michael Kirby, "Visual Urge: Scenic Innovations," in *Eye on Dance Series*, No. 220 (April 10, 1987), New York Public Library Dance Collection, Lincoln Center.

Fuller's attraction to the "scientific," and its connotations of masculinity helped to modernize and legitimize Fuller's status as an artist. But most writers on Fuller, such as Mallarmé, discussed her in terms of her "femininity," describing her particular femininity as both "new" and "modern." Definitions of modernism before World War I stretched far enough to include simultaneously the arts and sciences, and, by connotation, the "feminine" and "masculine" priciples. Andreas Huyssen has argued that one of the defining tropes of modernism was a distancing effect that invoked a separation from mass culture, a separation that also broke down along gender distinctions: the modern artist as masculine inventor/creator, the consumer as feminine mass culture.[23] Fuller, however, crosses over these lines and, in so doing, forces a different understanding of the relationship between modernism and the woman in motion. Her performances were praised as art and denigrated as mass culture; likewise, she was praised as artist, scientist, inventor, and "American." Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane have argued, using the same metaphoric "coupling" as Delsarte, that the Modern resulted from "the interpenetration, the reconciliation, the coalescence, the fusion. . . . of reason and unreason, intellect and emotion,

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[23] Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modeleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 188-208.

subjective and objective."[24] These binarisms seem more explicitly "modern" when the distinctions between them are blurred; when, for example, a figure such as Loie Fuller moves her silky costume in a pattern that makes the differentiation of either her aesthetics or her sex seem a difficult and indefinite task.

Fuller's dancing woman provides a compelling and anxious spectacle for the modern spectator. The intricacies of her movements subsume (but do not fully erase) the question of her sexuality. As Martha Banta has suggested about Fuller and other dancers at the turn-of-the-century, "Female celebrities did not call upon sexuality for effective self-display. Rather they enhanced their popularity by being *shapes in motion.*"[25] Banta's quote illustrates how motion itself was as fascinating to the public as overt erotic display. Fuller's body in motion signified action and competency as much as a type of artistic spectacle. For the turn-of-the-century public, Fuller's control over her stage and her career signified that she qualified as a "modern woman." But the images of her bodily movement generated the equally modern anxiety of the dissolution of categories. This "anxiety" is not simply the result of the spectacle of the body in motion, but is particularly a modern anxiety

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[24] Bradbury and McFarlane, 48.

[25] Banta, *Imaging American Women*, 624.

which results from the "technologizing" or "mechanical reproduction" of the woman's body in motion.

"Telling Motions" through Technology

Dancing School" is a 1905 photograph by Gertrude Kasebier that depicts an older woman and three younger girls in a circle. The woman is instructing the girls in how to dance. By their postures and the ghostly white traces surrounding their swinging skirts, it seems as if they have been captured by the camera while moving. Usually such ghostly traces attest to the inevitable movement of the photographic subject due to the length of the exposure time, but here Kasebier explores aesthetically the possibility of movement. The white skirts blend with the traces of motion, while both imprint a frozen temporality. The past remains present in the movement of the skirts.

At the same time as the appearance of the Kasebier photograph, a film entitled "School Girl Gymnastics" (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1904) is produced. In this short film, a teacher instructs a group of dancing students to build a pyramid. They attempt to build a pyramid that collapses after completion, leaving the girls in disarray on the floor.[26]

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[26] Kemp R. Niver, *Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection: 1894-1912*, ed. Bebe Bergsten, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 352.

Both the Biograph film and the Kasebier photograph suggest a link between the representation of still movement and the representation of filmic movement. The former carries only the traces of past gestures; the latter, the illusion of movement in the present. These early images of the female body in motion in both photography and film carry their own particular cultural currency. "Dancing School" and "School Girl Gymnastics" are more than just two early examples of the representation of motion. The two texts offer a starting point for understanding how the figure of Loie Fuller operated differently from these more typical examples. In both the photograph and the film a woman teaches young girls how to move. In the photograph the girls' skirts swirl up around their ankles as they form a circle around their teacher. In the film the collapse of the pyramid provides a revealing moment in which sexual difference is exposed. The images are at once private and public, intimate and voyeuristic. "Dancing School" and "School Girl Gymnastics" demonstrate the contradiction that is frequently at the heart of physical culture's representation of the woman in motion--a private pleasure reproduced for public consumption.

Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"(1936) describes how the techniques of mechanical reproduction reveal a new kind of knowledge

about the body.[27] For Benjamin the camera allows the viewer to analyze the particulars of "a person's posture during the fractional second of a stride," a kind of information previously unavailable to human perception. One of the tropes of modernism, as Johanna Drucker describes, is the scientific revision of techniques that inevitably reorganize a sense of visual space.[28] The spaces of the public sphere, the painter's canvas, or the photographer's or filmmaker's frame all reflect these changes. Benjamin goes on to wonder, ". . . of a screened behavior item which is neatly brought out in a certain situation, like a muscle of a body, it is difficult to say which is more fascinating, its artistic value or its value for science."[29] Benjamin's insight into the modern phenomenon of first framing within a visual space and then filming the body in motion echoes Eadweard Muybridge's 1888 work in *The Human Figure in Motion* that examines in photographic serial form bodies walking, running, dancing, and performing various physical exercises. Benjamin's essay, written forty years after Muybridge's study, suggests that Muybridge's own stated desire to achieve

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[27] Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 237.

[28] Johanna Drucker, *Theorizing Modernism: Visual Art and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 41.

[29] Benjamin, 236.

a "scientific" study of the body in motion was not just idle fancy, but represented a more general desire to understand the ways in which the body in motion *intersects* with late nineteenth and early twentieth century technologies.[30] The choice of metaphors here is important, as the rhetoric of the physical culture movement during these same forty years, as well as the work of Loie Fuller, trace the results of the modernist intersection or "interpenetration" of the body and technology on and through bodies of sexual difference.

Early uses of photography and film reinforce Benjamin's claims in "The Work of Art" that these new technologies destroyed the "aura" of the art work by fueling the desire of the masses to "get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness."[31] Science and art are metaphorically coupled through the cinematic apparatus and the desire to "get hold of an object." Benjamin mentions in even more specific metaphoric terms the "tendency" of film "to promote

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[30] Muybridge ascribed the value of his photographic work to their being "seriates of phases, demonstrating the various changes which take place in the disposition of the limbs and body during the evolution of some act of motion from its inception to its completion" *The Human Figure in Motion* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1989),7; Marta Braun disputes Muybridge's scientific claims in her study *Picturing Time:The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey, (1830-1904)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. In contrast to Marey's photographic and filmic work of bodies in motion, Braun argues that Muybridge was more showman than scientist.

[31] Benjamin, 223.

the mutual penetration of art and science."[32] To see a woman's body at "close range" or in "slow motion" the viewer needs the justification of either science or art to legitimize the gaze. A "masculinized" technology investigates the "feminine" arts, slows down the image, freezes it, studies it. But is something new born of this "mutual penetration?"

Benjamin paraphrases the belief of Muybridge and other early writers, when he says that, "evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye--if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."[33] The "unconsciously penetrated space" which reveals a "different nature," is quite often in early film the figure of a dancing female. Many early films also showed women twirling their skirts around them. One of the first Edison films was titled *Serpentine Dance* (1894), also known under *Annabelle-the-Dancer*, and was performed by an imitator of Loie Fuller, Annabelle Whitford Moore. Edison, as Fuller would later do, hand-colored this version to imitate light on costume.[34] This

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[32] Benjamin, 236.

[33] Benjamin, 236-7.

[34] Harris, 31; According to Terry Ramsye, Fuller was offered the chance to make a film with Edison, but sent her sister instead who made a film under the name of La Loie in 1896. The first film with Moore is well-documented and was widely shown. I have not found any other evidence of

film is one of the earliest examples of a woman dancing in front of the camera. Hundreds more were to follow over the next twenty years. An entire genre of films about "physical culturalists" and "vaudevillians" featured gymnasts, acrobats, and chorus girls. What goes unstated in Benjamin is that the "different nature" revealed in these particular films is, in fact, the nature of difference. The spectacle of the woman dancing in a space "penetrated" by the masculinist technology of the camera reveals her sexual difference.

The Library of Congress Paper Print Collection from 1894 to 1912 lists well over a hundred "Vaudeville Acts" that include some form of dance, acrobatics, or vaudeville comedy.[35] Within this list there are twenty-five acts that describe "Physical Culturalists" with titles such as "The Physical Culture Girl" (Edison, 1903) and "Latina, Physical Culture Poses, Nos. 1-3" (American Mutoscope and Biograph Co, 1905). What were the historical parameters of the physical culture phenomenon? How did they affect the apparent desire to reproduce both scientific and aesthetic appropriations of the feminine form in motion?

Ramsaye's 1896 film with Fuller's sister. Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights: A History of the Motion Picture Through 1925* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1926), 253.

[35] Niver, 359.

The beginning of the physical culture movement in this country is credited to a group of German immigrants, known as the Turnvereins, who came to the United States in the 1820s.[36] The Turnvereins, or Turners as they came to be called, advocated developing the body in order to increase a sense of national pride. Much has been written on early cinema's ideological efforts to instill recent immigrants with a sense of being an "American."[37] The physical culture movement demonstrated similar goals, but besides including immigrants, physical culture became an important ideological practice for New England WASPs as well.[38] By World War I, there were 40,000 Turners--men, women, and children to whom lessons in gymnastics were as important as lessons in patriotism.

Besides instilling patriotic feelings in the public, the physical culture movement demonstrated a corresponding obsession with anthropometry--the measuring of the body. Dr.Dudley Sargent, the designer of one of the first sets of weight machines, displayed, to much publicity at the 1893

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[36] Paula Welch and Harold Lerch, *History of American Physical Education and Sport*,(Springfield,IL: C.C. Thomas, 1981), 103.

[37] Noel Burch, *Life to those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[38] See T.J.Jackson Lear, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

World's Fair in Chicago, a chart of the "Physical Proportions of the Typical Man." The chart was designed "to furnish the youth of both sexes with a laudable incentive to systematic and judicious physical training by showing them, at a glance, their relation in size, strength, symmetry, and development to the normal standard."[39] Rarely, however, were the techniques of measurement deployed equally amongst "both sexes." Dr.Clelia Mosher found that anthropometric data for women was inadequate as was the machinery used to measure them. In 1915 she invented the schematograph which measured women's posture through a camera that used a rotoscoping effect to create a silhouette of the female body.[40] Both Sargent and Mosher demonstrate the fascination that science held for measuring sexual difference through images produced by modern technology.

The physical culture movement was obsessed with sexual difference in other ways as well. By 1915 there were over 65,000 women signed up for YWCA gym classes and 32,000 for swim lessons.[41] Theorists such as Sargent, however, still insisted on the physical and mental inferiority of the female body. Sargent suggested that when women participated in

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[39] Welch, 119.

[40] Welch, 121.

[41] Betty Spears, *History of Sport and Physical Education in the United States* (Dubuque,Iowa: Wm. C. Brown, 1988), 208.

sports, they "either inherited or acquired masculine characteristics." The YMCA and the YWCA both taught courses in anatomy, physiology, and anthropometry that reinforced gender distinctions. Participation in sports for men would emphasize competition, leadership, team play, while coaches for women's teams would applaud "playing one's best, gaining a sense of honor, learning self sacrifice for the sake of the team, and developing a democratic spirit."[42] Physical culture initially attempted to maintain rigid distinctions between masculine and feminine codes of bodily movement, but the distinctions would gradually begin to disintegrate as more and more women began to participate in physical and political activities.

The body and its movements increasingly became not only an object to be measured and studied, a mass to be exercised and shaped, but also an instrument to express the self. A more aesthetic, although no less regimented aspect of the physical culture movement began with the importation into the United States of Francois Delsarte's theories in 1869. Delsarte assigned spiritual functions to bodily functions. He divided the body into zones of three with each third representing an emotional or spiritual state. According to Delsarte, from harnessing the "powers" of body and spirit, "results the intimate fusion of art and science, which,

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[42] Spears, 208.

though each one is born of a different source, nevertheless ally, *interpenetrate* and reciprocally prove each other" [my emphasis].[43] The Delsartean "interpenetration" of art and science through the movement of the body initiates a theme which echoes throughout writers on physical culture, dance, and film: through the "penetration"--of art and science, of feminine and masculine--a modern knowledge about the body emerges.

Delsartean "attitudes" were performed in all sorts of public and private spaces: in salons and schools, club meetings and churches, men and women expressed emotions, imitated mythological characters, and practiced rhythmic excercises with their performing bodies. But the physical culture movement consumed more than just the leisure time of Americans. From the New York stage to the factory floor, emphasis was placed on watching, measuring, and enjoying the image of the body in motion. For example, Martha Banta has studied the ideology of time management developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the 1890s as another way that the movements of the body were scrutinized and "managed."[44] Taylor's ideas became important not only in the factory and

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[43] Stebbins, 67.

[44] Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 376 ft.32; See also Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass: 1981).

office spaces of America, but also in the domestic space of the home. "Women's work" and the movements that the female body made within her domestic space became the object of this new "scientific" gaze, which analyzed female gestures for "efficiency." As Helen Campbell explains in her 1893 book *The Easiest Way in Housekeeping and Cooking*, the work expected of "the typesetter, the cabinet-maker, or carpenter" and their "ability to *make each motion tell*[my emphasis]," became the equal expectation of the woman in the kitchen.[45] The discourse about the body at the turn-of-the-century is dominated by this idea of *witnessing*--a type of voyeurism that was not so secret, that expected to see, know, and consequently shape the multiple meanings behind the language of male and female bodies.

What other evidence is there in these early years of the twentieth century that writers, scientists, or artists believed that *motions* could *tell*? And what kind of information did they believe that these movements revealed? Benjamin suggests in "The Work of Art" that film could provide us with an opportunity to discover "hidden details of familiar objects" and that slow motion techniques could "reveal entirely new structural formations of the subject." Although Benjamin's "subject" is not overtly gendered female (even though he makes reference to a filmic space that is

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[45] Quoted in Banta, *Taylored Lives*, 233.

"unconsciously penetrated"), other writers during this same period, when discussing movement or dance, tend to talk about either a feminized subject or the subject of femininity.

Rudolf Laban (1897-1958) was a German movement and dance theorist who worked throughout Europe in the twenties and thirties and had many followers, primarily women, in the United States. Laban often used photographic and filmic metaphors to discuss how movement expressed meaning. He argued that the mind perceived movement with a "snapshot-like perception" which created the illusion of a "standstill" from the "unceasing stream of movement."[46] His writings share much with Benjamin's argument that slow motion film techniques reveal knowledge or meaning, but Laban goes a step further in defining a preference for the kind of subject who most easily "reveals" knowledge through movement:

> The differing inner attitudes of individual personalities provide the different planes on which the snapshots can be projected. To begin with the most integrated attitude, we can state that children and the primitive man have both a natural gift for bodily movement and a natural love for it. In later periods of individual or racial life, man becomes cautious, suspicious, and sometimes even hostile to movement.[47]

The body becomes a "plane" or a screen onto which "snapshots" of movement are projected. The "individual personalities"

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[46] Rudolf von Laban, *The Mastery of Movement*. (London: Macdonald and Evans, 1960), 3.

[47] Laban, 5-6.

combined with these projections create the meaning of both person and movement. Laban reveals a bias for the "primitive" personality which is innocent of "civilized" behaviors. The "feminized" or "primitive" other is most fully able to reveal a cinematic truth about themselves through movement.

Rudolf Arnheim, writing at the same time as Laban and Benjamin (and from whom Benjamin received some of his ideas about slow motion), discusses in his 1934 essay "Motion" the "dance-like quality" of early silent films.[48] He also uses feminized subjects, in this case a mother and child, as examples of how different kinds of knowledge about self are revealed through cinematic movement:

> Motion not only serves to inform the audience of the events that make up the story. It is also highly expressive. When we watch a mother putting her child to bed we not only understand what is going on but also learn from the calm or hasty, smooth or fumbling, energetic or weak, sure or hesitant gestures of the mother *what kind of person she is*, how she feels at the particular moment, and what her relationship is to her child. The contrast between the irrational struggling of the infant and the controlled behaviour of the mother may produce a counterpoint of visual motion, which determines the expression of the scene at least as effectively as do the more static factors of how mother and child look and in what kind of setting the action takes place [emphasis mine].[49]

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[48] Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 152.

[49] Arnheim, 150-151.

Arnheim's ideas here are interesting not only because they reflect the idea that movement reveals knowledge about the subject, but also because of the *kind* of knowledge he says is being revealed. Arnheim's example is also remarkable because of its similarity to Jacques Lacan's image of the child before the mirror in "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I," an essay which has been used to great effect by film theory to talk about cinematic identification. In one passage Lacan describes the "motor incapacity" and "turbulent movements" of the child before the mirror in relation to the idealized image that the child sees in the mirror.[50] Arnheim's quote also uses the image of the "irrational struggling of the infant" to talk about how knowledge is revealed through a type of "screening," but in this case it is knowledge about the mother. Her handling of her child and the comparison between their two different styles of movement reveal "*what kind of person she is*," or, more specifically, what kind of mother she is. Arnheim's description of what happens between mother and child on film supports what Benjamin suggests in "Work of Art": that bodily movement on film can reveal what we cannot see with our own eyes, and that "the camera introduces us to

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[50] Jacques Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I," in *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 2.

unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses."[51]

Early film occasionally revealed some of the psychological dynamics underlying the spectacle of the woman's body in motion. The following description of "Model Posing Before Mirror" (American Mutoscope and Biograph, 1903) suggests the ambivalent feelings that a woman might have about the deliberate voyeurism involved when she dances:

> The first scene shows a set with a large full-length mirror at a one-quarter angle from the camera position. The first action is of a buxom woman dressed in a full, white leotard approaching the mirror. During the remainder of the film, the woman continually looks at her reflection in the mirror. It is difficult to decide whether she is viewing herself with alarm or approbation. Her pirouette and gestures are limited.[52]

This description is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it includes a mirror which is angled in such a way as to reveal the woman's gaze at her movements, but not the camera's gaze at her. Second, the reviewer notes not a look of private pleasure on the woman's face, but an ambiguous expression, which ranges from fear to dislike. She is not a skilled dancer, which may account for some of her anxiety, but perhaps not all of it. This short film encompasses the theme that I have identified in writings on film and dance: that a woman's bodily movements reveal a kind of knowledge

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[51] Benjamin, 237.

[52] Niver, 68.

about herself, a process that can induce anxiety as much as pleasure in both performer and spectator. "Model Posing Before Mirror" is unusual because of the inclusion of the mirror that directs the dancers' gaze at herself; however, this film reveals a symptom that most films in this genre try to conceal, the contradictory pleasure/anxiety that lies at the foundation of being an object of spectacle. As we shall see, Fuller also employs mirrors in her performances, but with a very different effect: she multiplies her image in a way that disperses the spectator's gaze and causes her actual body to disappear into a maze of virtual movement.

Besides focusing on how the woman in motion revealed knowledge about herself, both dance and film theorists imagined the effects that these movements would have on the spectator. These effects tend to break down into two types of reactions which are different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first spectator reaction involves a physical identification with the bodily movement on the screen. Toe-tapping to music or tensing muscles while watching a performance falls into this category. The second reaction reinforces the already voyeuristic tendencies of the cinema and emphasizes the *scientia sexualis* of physical culture and early film movement.[53] In this case the spectator

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[53] See Linda Williams's discussion of Michel Foucault's understanding of *scientia sexualis* in Muybridge's work in *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

remains immobile, a watcher who is curious but not a participant.

The well-known dance critic, John Martin, writing in 1939 illustrates the first type of spectator reaction to dance. He is not talking necessarily about dance on film, but his ideas are reminiscent of other film theorists. Martin developed an idea which he called "inner mimicry" to try and explain the physical reaction of watching dance on stage. As he explains:

> Since we respond muscularly to the strains in architectural masses and the attitude of rocks, it is plain to be seen that we will respond even more vigorously to the action of a body exactly like our own. We shall cease to be spectators and become participants in the movement that is presented to us, and though to all outward appearances we shall be sitting quietly in our chairs, we shall nevertheless be dancing synthetically with all our musculature.[54]

Martin's ideas sound similar to Benjamin's conception of the "tactility" of experiencing architecture in "Work of Art," but they also are reminiscent of Lacan's mirror stage of identification wherein the subject desires the same bodily control it sees reflected in the mirror.[55] In another vein, Sergei Eisenstein suggested taping dynamite to the bottom of

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[54] John J. Martin, *Introduction to the Dance* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1939), 53.

[55] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," *Ecrits*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977); See Michael Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993) for a discussion of Benjamin's ideas about tactility and the modern condition.

his film viewer's chairs in order to elicit a bodily response from them, to jolt them physically into revolutionary thoughts and actions.[56] I am not trying to argue that the film spectator has some kind of physiological response to movement on film, (even if we do) but rather to point out the currency of these ideas at the end of the silent era. More than one writer believed that filmed movement, by combining the art of the dancer with the technology of the camera, contained the ability to elicit viscerally a physical response from the spectator.

The other type of spectator reaction to the movement of the female or feminized subject on film is perhaps the easiest to explain because it is the most acknowledged--the pleasure/anxiety of the cinematic voyeur. Siegfried Kracauer, writing somewhat later than the other theorists I have examined, describes this spectatorial experience most succinctly when he discusses Roger Tilton's documentary *Jazz Dance*.

> Records of dancing sometimes amount to an intrusion into the dancer's intimate privacy. His self-forgetting rapture may show in queer gestures and distorted facial expressions which are not intended to be watched, save by those who cannot watch them because they themselves participate in the dancing. Looking at such secret displays is like spying; you feel ashamed for entering a *forbidden realm* where things are going on which must be experienced, not witnessed. However, the supreme virtue of the

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[56] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," *Wide Angle* 8:3-4 (1986): 63-70.

> camera consists precisely in acting the voyeur [my emphasis].[57]

Kracauer's comparison of witnessing dance on film to entering a "forbidden realm" does not specify an overtly feminized subject (whether male or female, "white" or "ethnic"), however, the metaphoric allusions of a "forbidden realm," like Freud's "dark continent" of female subjectivity, reverberate with allusions to otherness. The spectatorial experience of witnessing dance, then, encompasses many possibilities: the secret pleasures/anxieties of the voyeur, "scientific" curiousity, aesthetic enjoyment, a physiological recognition. One reaction that is not mentioned frequently, except by dance critics, is the pleasure of identifying with a kind of bodily inhibition or competency which was previously denied. After the turn-of-the-century, women such as Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller performed publicly in ways that were dramatically different from the classical ballet dancer or the vaudevillian skirt dancer. These women danced alone, demonstrating choreographic control of their material and communicating with their bodies in ways that effectively heralded a modern age of performance for women.

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[57] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 43. For a more extensive analysis of Kracauer's work on dancers, particularly his article on "The Mass Ornament," see Chapter Three.

Loie Fuller

> The magic that Loie Fuller creates, with instinct, with exaggeration, the contraction of skirt or wing, instituting a place. The enchantress creates the ambience, draws it out of herself and goes into it, in the palpitating silence of crêpe de chine.[58]

When Loie Fuller enveloped her entire body with yards of undulating silk and manipulated her image with mirrors and colored lights, she practised simultaneously the disappearance and reappearance of her feminine body. Folies Bergére posters of Fuller depicted her in transparent, breast-revealing material, but the scandalous nature of her costumes seemed insignificant to reviewers when contrasted with the spectacular movements of light, color, material, and body. Mallarmé described Fuller's silky costume as if it were a second skin, playing, as Felicia McCarren notes in her translation, off the similarities in sound between "soi"(herself) and "soie"(silk). The movement of the material was inseparable from the movement of her body, providing for Mallarmé's poet/spectator a pure presence that illustrated in bodily form what poetry could only point towards.

Loie Fuller's film *Fire Dance* represents a continuation of Mallarmé's dream-like merging of materials. She was involved in the organizational aspects of the film, and

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[58] Mallarmé, "Crayonne au theâtre," quoted in McCarren (her translation), 225.

demanded the hand-tinting of individual frames to achieve the illusion of colored lights on silk. The result is a brief piece, not much longer than a minute, which shows Fuller in her famous costume transformed from a butterfly into a whirling dervish, and finally disappearing into a kaleidoscope of colored material. Early hand-tinting does not appear to be a part of the film's mise-en-scene; like the frameless animation of Stan Brakhage's avant-garde piece, *Dog Star Man*, tinting seems to add magically a separate layer. The coloring appears deliberately faked and reminds the viewer of the materiality of the film itself. In *Fire Dance* Fuller approached the film as she approached her body, as a form that she would fill with movement and color.

Art Nouveau and Symbolist sensibilities seem to impact Fuller at an early age. Fuller began her dancing career in vaudeville in the 1880s and started to perform "skirt" dancing, where women manipulated their skirts in different patterns, in 1890 after working with Kate Vaughan and the Gaiety Players in London.[59] In 1892 Fuller developed out of skirt dancing her "Serpentine Dance" for a play in New York in which she portrayed a young girl hypnotized by a Dr.Quack. Fuller describes in her autobiography published in 1913 that her movements were choreographed to express an hypnotic

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[59] Harris, 16. The skirt dance was apparently invented for Vaughn by Jean d'Autan, the ballet master of the Gaiety Theatre.

trance; they involved primarily her moving silky cloth around her body in circular and "S"-shaped patterns as she danced across the stage. For one performance, however, she placed colored glass in front of the projector and directed it at her costume.[60] "Serpentine Dance" became an immediate sensation, an example of modern femininity in living color and was soon documented on film.

Fuller's instincts for a compelling performance developed quickly. She was neither young nor particularly graceful when she first started her elaborate skirt dancing, but she soon realized that she did not need to be. Since Fuller was not a trained dancer, she shifted from moving around the stage to remaining more stationary and allowing the material of her costume to move around her. She increased the amount of material and simplified not only her vertical movement, but also her stage and costume designs. Fuller's patented skirt costume was made of three triangular pieces of material, long in the back and short in the front. Into the arms of the skirt, which began at her neck and went down to the floor, were stitched two long "wands" of bamboo or aluminum which would enable her to swirl her skirt with

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[60] Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life, with Some Account of Her Distinguished Friends* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1978); See also Felicia McCarren's excellent analysis of the Fuller's relationship to hypnosis, hysteria, and electricity in "The 'Symptomatic Act' Circa 1900: Hysteria, Hypnosis, Electricity, Dance," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 21: 4 (Summer 1995): 748-774.

greater control around her. She could throw her costume of gossamer silk ten to twelve feet in the air above her head.

Besides performing her own choreography, Fuller also patented complex stage designs. One design used a combination of mirrors and lights to give the illusion of many dancers on stage. She draped the stage in black velvet and used electric lights and color filters to suggest form. While the rest of the theater was dark, Fuller would switch the lights according to the color and mood she wanted to make. This kind of artistic experimentation with stage lighting had not been done before. Not until Appia's innovative designs with the Futurists in 1896 would any other artist add significantly to innovation in electic lighting and stage design.[61] In 1899 Fuller patented in Germany an addition to her "hall of mirrors" stage design. She included a sheet of glass at the front of the stage and a mirror at the back. According to the patent, "the effect is almost as though the audience itself were in a cell that had walls consisting of non-transparent mirrors."[62] But perhaps her most effective patented design was the one she used in her "Fire Dance," which involved a false floor with glass holes in it to reveal colored lights under the stage. The lights would illuminate the dancer as she moved across the stage.

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[61] See Sally Sommer's comments in *Visual Urge: Scenic Innovations*.

[62] Harris, 19.

Fuller also included a "pedestal of light" in the center of the stage. The pedestal was made of glass and topped with a glass plaque so that the dancer "will appear to be mysteriously suspended in air."[63] Fuller would paint abstract designs on the glass slides that illuminated her, and later she painted phosphorous onto her costumes.

Fire Dance begins with a paper butterfly flapping its wings and then dissolves to a shot of Loie Fuller in the same position, moving her arms of silk in a way that imitates the motion of the butterfly. The material of her dress undulates while different tinted colors flash off and on. In Fuller's stage performance of the "Fire Dance," the lighting would start with what appeared to be a bluish flame at the bottom of her dress. As the lights changed colors and moved higher, Fuller would move to the rhythm of the music, most often Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. Her head and arms were draped with veils, and at a certain point in the dance, only her eyes would show through the fabric. The effect of her costume swirling in flame-colored lighting gave some critics the feeling of "something satanic and demonic, but of a gentle satanism, of a poetic and suggestive demonality which

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[63] As reported by Sommer in *Visual Urge: Scenic Innovations*. Sommer also suggests that Fuller's death from cancer at a relatively early age may have been due to her exposure to phosphorous.

sets one on the starry and luminous path of hashishien dreams. . . ."[64]

The dramatic lighting effect is not as obvious in the film. Neither is the sophisticated stage set. Instead, Fuller used editing to create the illusion of continuous movement which begins with the transformation from butterfly into woman. In the most dramatic scene of the film, Fuller turns in a circle while her dress bobs around her like a wavy hula skirt. The material from the arms of the dress starts to move higher into the air until it covers her head and renders her entire body invisible. All we see is a moving swath of material suspended in the air--a visual metaphor for consumption by fire. Editing extends the period of time during which we see this "trick." Then suddenly the body disappears. The overall effect of *Fire Dance* is more akin to a Méliès magic show than to a physical culture act or a vaudeville chorus. The emphasis in this film is on the costume, its movement, and the editing that creates the illusion of a swirling cloth that remains suspended for an unnatural period of time. Other early dance films tend to emphasize ethnic or sexual difference. Fuller's body in motion tells the story of her difference. *Fire Dance* shrouds its mystery in the materials of its making, which include cloth as much as celluloid.

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[64] Harris, 22.

Two moments stand out in Fuller's biography as representative of the way in which her contemporaries appropriated her figure and associated it with their own movements. The first is the 1900 Paris *l'Exposition Universelle*, remembered primarily for its foregrounding of the Art Nouveau movement of which Loie Fuller is often considered to be the "living embodiment."[65] The 1900 Exposition had an entire theatre donated to Fuller's company. The Loie Fuller Theatre had a complicated facade, a sculptured curtain, which appeared to be rippling. On top of the theatre was a life-sized sculpture of Fuller whose wave-like costume dissolved into the facade. Inside, Fuller performed her "Danses Lumineuses" to packed houses, and she featured dancers from Japan, such as Sada Yacco. Art Nouveau was particularly obsessed with all things feminine: long flowing hair and robes; feminine objects that might appear in the bedroom or boudoir. Art Nouveau generated as many decorative lamps as it did paintings and chief among those figures represented was Fuller. Jules Cheret made posters of her. Raoul Larche made bronzes with electric lights out of her figure. Whistler, William Nicholson, and Hippolyte Lucas painted her. Rodin drew sketches of her and Pierre Roche sculpted her.

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[65] Martin Battersby, *Art Nouveau* (Feltham: Hamlyn, 1969), 11.

But it was not just Fuller's theatre at the exposition that represented a female in flowing motion, all of Paris was populated by images of women in motion. On the ceiling of Siegfried Bing's L'Art Nouveau gallery was painted "a circle of eight dancing figures of girls, their long flowing skirts forming swirling arabesques of movement."[66] Georges de Feure designed posters of Loie Fuller which were all over the city. According to Martin Battersby, De Feure "seems to have regarded women as decorative objects in themselves, rarely depicting them in contemporary costume but always dressed, if dressed at all, in decoratively arranged draperies or in a version of the costume of a romantic and unspecified period of history."[67] The female figures, objectified as they were in statues, lamps, pins and chairs represented a kind of dispersed national spirit. They were typically represented as forms and transformations that reinforced heroic victimization or martyrdom, such as in Fuller's "Fire Dance" performed with its Wagnerian accompaniment. As Rastignac says of Fuller, she is "restless, seductive, and unreal", a "dragonfly. . . . whose iridescent wings have exactly the changing reflections of the robe of the American." The simulated or real movement of Fuller's costume came to represent a nation and a history in flux, on the verge of

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[66] Battersby, 51.

[67] Battersby, 56.

change and a new century. In Rastignac's quote, which is so representative of Art Nouveau ideology, Fuller is transformed from seductive woman to insect and then into the national signifier of the "changing" American. But Fuller just as easily represented the "spirit" of France, Italy or Germany.

Besides being associated with national ideologies, Fuller came to embody the idea for the "new theatre" (which often fed back into nationalism). Mallarmé, as mentioned earlier, described Fuller as an "enchantress" and "the personification of his dream of the ideal theater--without scenery, without words, where space and time had no importance, where reality would not intrude between the idea and the audience."[68] Fuller herself claimed an overwhelming belief in the power of her movement to express a new kind of meaning both on stage and in film. "Since motion and not language is truthful," Fuller asserted, "we have accordingly perverted our powers of comprehension."[69] Other Symbolists, such as Yeats, Manet, and Whistler also found her image in motion to personify "truth." Debora Silverman argues in *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France* that Fuller's "Serpentine Dance" was "linked to the form and meaning of *psychologie nouvelle*," a movement that "offered the public a new kind of psychological theater, replacing Charcot's spectacle of

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[68] Harris, 29.

[69] Fuller, 72.

female hysteria with a feminine aesthetic vision embodying unconscious forces."[70] Fuller's interest in form, color, and internal psyches revealed, from a turn-of-the-century perspective, "truths" about the modern body as it made its way through the spaces of cities, factories, parks and was documented by photography and film. Silverman's transition from Charcot to Fuller exemplifies an Art Nouveau and, consequently a modernist sensibility, the blurring of scientific and aesthetic interests through the body of the woman-in-motion.

Perhaps the most unusual invocation of Fuller's figure occurs in another "modern" art movement, the work of F.T. Marinetti and the Futurists. Futurism, according to Andrew Hewitt, is connected intimately to Art Nouveau and the Symbolists.[71] Even though Marinetti claimed to despise the organic underpinnings of Art Nouveau in favor of the inventions of man, he nevertheless needed the movement in order to react against it. Fuller demonstrates how the two movements actually shared a number of things in common. In his "Manifesto of the Futurist Dance," Marinetti appears to

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[70] Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siecle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989),299-300.

[71] Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 107. See also Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* and Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance*.

have been attracted to Fuller because of her use of electricity, but I suggest that he was also attracted to the disappearance of Fuller's body inside cloth. Marinetti's ideal theater, much like Mallarme's, was a stage without bodies or a stage which showed only the "*multiplied body* of the motor." The humanity, and by inference, the sexuality of the body "disappeared" by becoming metal, machine, and electricity. Fuller's use of mirrors multiplied her body, her costume made that body disappear, and she used electricity to illuminate herself, but one may wonder how Fuller's butterfly imagery could possibly "achieve the metallicity of the Futurist dance."

The Futurist appropriation of Fuller is an attempt by a masculinist, anti-humanist, and eventually nationalist aesthetic to reintegrate a feminine aesthetic (in more general terms, the aesthetic of otherness--women, lower classes, ethnic exotics, children). Art Nouveau, using quite different aesthetics, also appropriated the woman's body in motion to suggest an heroic modernism that was also affiliated with growing European nationalism. Trying to "tell" what the motions of a woman might mean at the turn-of-the-century became a rallying cry for the scientifically and aesthetically curious. Fuller's aesthetic, however, resists being defined as either feminine or masculine. She was at once an object of spectacle, a subject for the new technology of film, a representative for numerous artistic and

nationalistic ideologies, and a woman in charge of her own artistic taste and career. She was and is a heavily charged image of the "Modern" woman at the turn of the century: a lyrical body in motion, disappearing only to reappear in another place.

CHAPTER 3
EXPRESSIONISTIC GESTURES: THE IMPACT OF MODERN DANCE IN *THE WIND*.

> The emotional projection of the dancer is an extremely delicate matter, since the acting element of the dance art is not its dominant feature. It cannot be simply an abbreviated realism or it falls [short] of being either dancing or acting; nor can it be a wholly stylized concept without becoming lifeless and cold. It must be complete, compressed, refined, eloquent, but unobtrusive.[1]

> In the nineteenth century actors were taught balance and movement by dancing masters, so that a good deal of silent film behavior--with its air of grace and refinement, its flexibility and sentimental lyricism--seems vaguely related to classical ballet; thus Gish has an erect posture and a quality of delicacy mixed with strength that might have been learned in a dancing class. . . .[2]

Lillian Gish said once that she thought Dorothy Scarborough's novel would make a perfect movie because "It was pure motion."[3] Victor Seastrom's *The Wind* (1928) is also a perfect movie with which to develop a theory for reading gestural style in silent film because of the lack of much

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[1] *New York Times*,30 September 1928, xi, 1.

[2] James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 50.

[3] Lillian Gish interview for American Movie Classics, preceding the airing of *The Wind*.

symbolic direction (there are very few intertitles) and the specific nature of Gish's own performance style.

The film opens with Lillian Gish's character, Letty Mason, travelling on a train through a deserted Western landscape. Shots of Letty on the train are intercut with shots of the train in motion through the landscape. These shots of the landscape soon include indexical proof of the wind that whips up the desert sand, and deposits it in Letty's lap through the train window. Other shots within the interior of the train include glance/glance reverses between Letty and the male antagonist, Wirt Roddy. In a rather short period of time, Gish manages to portray a range of emotions that include nervousness, flirtatiousness, and fear with only slight adjustments of her face and body.

The Wind's opening scene provides a metaphor that connects technology (the train and the camera), the Western frontier (the desert and the wind), and the woman's body (that attempts to negotiate these uncomfortable crossings). This important opening sequence establishes a relationship between Letty and the types of movement that act on her--the train that carries her, the wind that covers her, and the man who tries to seduce her. Wirt Roddy, who later rapes Letty and is then killed by her, says about the wind in this opening scene: "Day in, day out--whistlin' and howlin'--makes folks go crazy--especially women!" In this scene, one of the few where Gish reacts directly to language, Letty

responds to Roddy's comments by making her eyes grow large and glazed, her lips part slightly in a typically melodramatic stare, shot in close-up. This look of fear appears on her face frequently throughout the film as she *reacts* to the forces that move her. Equally as expressive as her face, however, is Gish's bodily movement, which responds to the force of the wind with a frenetic dance-like quality that sweeps Letty across the frame and back. Significantly, the quality of Gish's movements begins to change as Letty takes a more *active* role in her environment.

Because generalizing about film acting is such a slippery task, I wish to remain as textually and historically specific as possible. In other words, I am not assuming that the gestural style which I identify in *The Wind* appears in other Gish performances. However, it is my hope that other critics will corroborate the existence of the specific gestural phenomena that I find in *The Wind* in other texts of the period.

How does bodily gesture signify in film? Trying to theorize how gesture communicates meaning has long been a difficult contradiction for philosophers and semioticians. Since the early days of film, but especially by the 1920s, directors, actors, and physical culturalists published books on acting for the cinema. Recently, film theory has begun to acknowledge the impact of these early writings and manuals on changes in gestural styles in the cinema. However, most

theories of gesture and acting have tended to view film acting in a rather linear fashion, projecting a fairly straight development from nineteenth century theatrical melodrama towards the more subtle or "realist" approach that cinematic framing seems to demand.

The most notable recent contribution to this argument is Roberta Pearson's *Eloquent Gestures*. In this work Pearson considers how cinematic acting in Biograph films shifted between the years 1908-1913 from the more "melodramatic" theatrical style, which she names the "histrionic code," to a "realist" style which she links to the realist movement in American literature and drama, and which she calls the "code of verisimilitude."[4] My discussion necessarily appropriates some of Pearson's useful vocabulary as a starting point for my own investigation of Gish's gestural style in *The Wind*, for, even though the time periods are distinctly different, Pearson is one of the few writers who provides a structural reading model for gesture that allows for historical analysis. She also considers the importance of the physical culture movement and Delsartean practices to the development of a "lexicon" of the gestural style that she finds typical of the histrionic code of acting. I will, however, add a different historical dimension to Pearson's work by

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[4] Roberta E. Pearson, *Eloquent Gestures: The Transformation of Performance Style in the Griffith Biograph Films* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 18-37.

considering the modern dance movement and the impact of expressionism on acting styles in the late twenties. The impact of modern dance and its institutional connections to the training of film actors, as well as modern dance's iconographic resemblance to gestural style in American film has only recently been closely examined.[5] I wish to add to this debate by suggesting the existence of a gestural style in the late twenties which is neither histrionic nor verisimilar, but more closely linked to a kind of expressionistic modern dance. I am not referring simply to the expressive, dance-like gestures of a film such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), although I believe there is a connection, but to a style that is imbued with an expressionist ideology grounded in Delsartean philosophy and the modern dance which developed from it, a style which attempted to define itself and was defined by outsiders as "American."

I do not wish to refute Pearson's observations about the Griffith films during these years; however, I do believe that the totalizing nature of her historical narrative neglects the possibility of certain exceptional moments in film

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[5] Jane Desmond, "Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's 'Radha' of 1906," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 17:1 (1991): 28-49; Gaylyn Studlar, "Douglas Fairbanks: Thief of the Ballet Russes," *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance*, Ellen W. Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy, ed. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995): 107-124.

acting. Acting careers, such as Gish's, that span many decades and many directors, do not necessarily conform to chronological demarcations of stylistic shifts. Actresses during the teens and twenties often began their training under a Delsartean or "histrionic" influence, and then were affected by the drive towards a verisimilar style of acting that Pearson identifies between 1908-1913. In Gish's case I do not see Griffith's call for a less "theatrical" style of cinematic acting during the years up to 1913 as precluding the impact of other styles on Gish which emerged later, in particular the drive towards a modern expressionistic mode that developed during the twenties in both Germany and America.

The move towards American nationalism in all of the arts following World War I provides a partial explanation for the interest in an American gestural style as well as the interest in national narratives. In the United States we find in both modern dance and film an attraction to narratives involving Native Americans and frontier history. *The Wind* is a singular example of this nationalistic interest, because, unlike most features, it includes a female protagonist in the pioneer role. Even though Gish's character is framed within a melodrama, rather than a classic Western or frontier film genre, Letty Mason retains the heroic qualities of the American pioneer. The use of the melodramatic mode in this film offers an opportunity for an

expressive style that has been characterized both positively and negatively as "feminine."

Gish's character, Letty, represents a type of pioneer woman who was a familiar figure in American iconography at the time--a figure who is at first a victim of the landscape, but one who eventually conquers both land and fear.[6] Pioneer characters became a popular choice for silent film not only because the pioneer lifestyle involved physical actions that could be translated easily into non-verbal communication, but also because of the growing sense of nationalism that the pioneer spirit seemed to embody without words. In filmic representation, the pioneer woman of the 1920s was almost always associated with domestic tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and maintaining the emotional side of family life in an environment that was as hostile or indifferent to emotional display as the pioneer husband often was.[7] These

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[6] In her examination of the iconography of the pioneer prairie women, Carol Fairbanks in *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 76, describes three distinct types: the Prairie Angel, Prairie Victim, and Frontier Hero. The Angel is typically a strong maternal type who takes provides for herself and her family. The Prairie Victim Fairbanks sees as the immigrant wife who reluctantly journeys west with her husband leaving behind family, friends, and comfort. The Frontier Hero may be represented as the independent homesteader who makes it on her own against all odds.

[7] In films specifically about pioneers, Larry Langman notes that "despite the manipulations of movie makers to place females in subordinate roles, women gained a mythical status in the early silents." Filmmakers "never depicted the wives and mothers as wanting to return to civilization." *A Guide to Silent Westerns*, Bibliographies and Indexes in the

domestic actions often bear the weight of feminine emotional expression in films which represent pioneer life.

Gish's gestures in *The Wind*, even when performing a domestic chore such as sweeping, are imbued with a symbolic code that moves beyond the iconic representation of a task. Her movement style is more fluid than the histrionic tableau of earlier melodrama and more expressive than the verisimilar code that Pearson describes in the Biograph films. The variations in Gish's bodily movement become themselves a kind of metaphor for the frontier: a border that represents the ambiguous distinction between movement and dance, between control of and relinquishment to nature and men. Letty's battle for subjectivity is exteriorized in her attempts to maintain her balance in the face of the wind and Roddy's attacks. Her body is symbolically buffeted on the edge of a landscape that threatens to swallow up her self.

Expressionistic Gesture

The erasure of the influence of modern dance on film is not surprising because it is a part of cultural history that involves both issues of sexual difference and the participation of large numbers of women in the 1920s. The history of modern dance is grounded in the nineteenth century

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Performing Arts, No. 13. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), xv. See also Cheryl J. Foote, "Changing Images of Women in the Western Film," *Journal of the West* 22, 4 (Oct. 1983): 64-71; Andrew Jefchak, "Prostitutes and Schoolmarms: An Essay of Women in Western Films," *Heritage of the Great Plains* 16, 3 (Summer 1983): 19-26.

physical culture movement, which not only affected gestural style in film, but also inaugerated a cultural movement that affected women throughout the United States. The movement began with the importation from France of the ideas of Francois Delsarte in 1869 by Steele Mackaye. By the turn of the century, Delsarte was a household word; by the 1920s Delsartean practices were institutionalized in gymnasiums, university departments, and private foundations. Most middle class white "young ladies" knew something about Delsartean expressive methods and could demonstrate some of the poses.[8]

Delsarte used relaxation techniques along with exercises to encourage self-expression. He assigned spiritual functions to bodily functions and divided the body into zones of three with each third representing an emotional or spiritual state. Every gesture or grouping of gestures expressed a specific motivational emotion. Here, for example, is a typical exercise which connects a gesture to an emotion. "Complex Emotional Action in Walk: is taken from an 1894 book on *Harmonic Gymnastics and Pantomimic Expression*:

> 1st action: Rhythm one and slow, poise elastic.
> Expression: Concentration or intensity of emotion in walk.
> 2nd action: Rhythm one and slow, poise passive.
> Expression: Cautious or secretive.

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[8] For early writers on Delsarte see Florence Fowle Adams, *Gesture and Pantomimic Action* (New York: Edgar S. Werne, 1897); Anna Morgan, *An Hour With Delsarte* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1889); and especially Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte's System of Expression* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1977).

3rd action: Rhythm one and slow, stride short.
Expression: Indolence.[9]

The symbolic nature of the Delsartean lexicon should be obvious. Ballet, another formalized gestural practice, has a lexicon, but emotional attitudes are not associated with a pirouette in the same way that a Delsartean stride is connected to "indolence." Pearson describes in *Eloquent Gestures* the histrionic code that developed out of Delsarte as emphasizing emotional expression through poses. Movement was generally used as a means to an end, as a way of getting to a pose or of transporting a still pose or expression. Poses were held so the audience would have enough time to "read" them. However, Pearson does not account for the type of Delsartean exercises that include expressive movement along with an attitude, such as the ones described above. Emotional expression associated with movement and not just with poses is an important distinction between the expressionistic gesture that I define through Delsarte and modern dance, and Pearson's histrionic gesture which emphasizes the static side of Delsartean practices.

Delsarte primarily found his way to the American public in the 1890s and 1900s through classes and salon performances of *attitudes*. Attitudes were poses which a performer demonstrated in tableau of various emotional states and

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[9] Marion Lowell, *Harmonic Gymnastics and Pantomimic Expression* (Boston: 1894), 300.

mythic or heroic figures. They were easily performed and readily identified and thus were not limited to the professional dancer. The general public, particularly the female public, practiced Delsarte throughout the first two decades of this century.[10] In *Imaging American Women*, Martha Banta's makes an interesting comparison between the simultaneous mass production of cameras and the mass production of Delsartean gestural practices:

> Just as the simplified system perfected by the Eastman Company for loading photographic film and adjusting the focus made it possible for anyone to take snaps with the Kodak Brownie, the codification of the Delsarte system encouraged the notion that no one need forgo 'the attitudes' just because one was an amateur, not a professional.[11]

Bodily performance became a "democratic" practice at the same time that picture-taking did. The convergence of these two practices is not necessarily coincidental: one provides a spectacle for the other. Likewise, the representation of women performing "physical culture" exercises was one of the more popular subjects for films made during this same period.[12]

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[10] Banta(b), 640.

[11] Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History*(New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 641.

[12] See Kemp R Niver, *Motion Pictures from the Library of Congress Paper Print Collection: 1894-1912*. ed. Bebe Bergsten (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

From the salons the Delsartean "attitudes" travelled to schools, churches, lodges, and civic groups. Women often found this particular form of body language to be liberating, although the context and content of most performances tended not to be overwhelmingly political.[13] Mythic heroines, women in melodramatic distress, and figures who tend to be suffering great pain made popular subject matter for the Delsartean mill. As important as these forms of bodily expression may have been for a female population that had little access to more verbal forms of expression, they primarily served to reinforce already existing iconic stereotypes; however, there were a few significant exceptions. For example, the feminist Margaret Wycherly posed as "Woman" in 1915 in order to "associate her demands for the vote with the Liberty pose."[14] More often than not, however, Delsartean attitudes acquired the reputation of feminine salon entertainment or worse, as an excuse for early film directors to get their subjects to strip down to their leotards.[15]

Pearson argues that Delsarte training led to a histrionic gestural style, which can be identified through

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[13] Banta, *Imaging American Women*, 654.

[14] Banta, *Imaging American Women*, 655.

[15] See video *Trailblazers of Modern Dance*, New York Public Library, Dance Collection, Lincoln Center.

iconic resemblance in Griffith Biograph films; she further clarifies this phenomenological approach by pointing out that the connections between the "Biograph and Delsarte style lie not in specific poses but in the overall principles of histrionically coded acting shared by the two."[16] Pearson defines the principles of the histrionic and verisimilar codes as follows:

> 1. Verisimilarly coded acting had no standard repertoire of gestures, no limited lexicon. The style defined itself by the very abandonment of the conventional gestures of the histrionic code. Actors no longer portrayed emotions and states of mind by selecting from a pre-established repertoire but by deciding what was appropriate for a particular character in particular circumstances.
> 2. Whereas the histrionic code tended to resemble digital communication, the verisimilar tended to resemble analogical communication. The histrionic code depended upon gestural isolation, each gesture sufficiently distinct to be read by the audience. Actors struck attitudes and took poses, with intervening gestures omitted. When the new-style actors used gesture (and they were counseled to use it sparingly), they employed a continuous flow of movement composed of little details rather than broad sweeping motions.
> 3. Though opposition still operated in the verisimilar code, the oppositions were not as extreme as in the histrionic code. The verisimilar style no longer held gestures for dramatic effect and the fully extended, upward, outward, or downward movements of heighened emotion were dropped.[17]

I quote Pearson at such length because of the specifics she provides which separate the "attitudes" and "poses" of the histrionic code from the more fluid style of the verisimilar

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[16] Pearson, 23-24.

[17] Pearson, 37.

code. Pearson describes the "continuous flow of movement composed of little details" as a sign of the verisimilar code. She is describing a flow, rather than flowing movement which I would describe as a sign of expressionistic gesture. The "little details" actually seek to hide the flow of the directed movement, whereas in expressionistic gesture, the flow and its emotional significance is foregrounded.

The distinctions that Pearson makes between the two styles of acting are valuable for the films she considers, but I find that these two categories are inadequate to cover certain gestural styles which are more fluid than histrionic tableau and more symbolic than verisimilar. I believe Pearson does not consider the extent to which certain variations of Delsarte got transformed into a less rigid system of movement, particularly in the theories of modern dance. Susan Roberts's analysis can be seen as offering support to my criticism of Pearson as she claims that Delsarte's "technique emphasizes the musical nature of gesture and movement," while forming the basis for "stylized gesture in the early screen melodrama."[18]

James Naremore in *Acting in the Cinema* also associates Delsarte with an expressive or stylized gestural performance in his examination of the role that Delsarte played in influencing film acting. He sees Delsarte as being as

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[18] Susan Roberts, "Melodramatic Performance Signs," *Framework* 32-33 (1986): 68-69.

important to the tradition of pantomime as Konstantin Stanislavsky was to realist acting; importantly, however, Naremore also sees a connection between the Delsartean training which began at the turn of the century and the reemergence of an expressionistic code in the 1920s. He argues that "the expressive behavior of the entire cast in *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) owes to Delsarte's vision of the theater."[19] Lon Chaney's performance in this film, which is often linked to the expressionist style of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), is, according to Naremore, the result of "the supple, demonstrative, highly codified style of pantomime that dominated the previous century and remained in use to a greater or lesser degree throughout silent movies."[20] Naremore continues to argue throughout his book, using Lillian Gish's performance style as an example, that what at first glance may seem to conform to a "realist" aesthetic

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[19] Naremore, 53.

[20] Naremore, 53. To Naremore's observations about *The Phantom of the Opera*, I would also emphasize, besides the expressionistic nature of Lon Chaney's performance, the importance of the opening scenes with the corps de ballet. After the ballet dancers have finished their piece on stage they continue to exhibit "dance-like" gestures back stage. When the phantom is first sighted, the dancers run in unison, while a few fling their arms over their heads in graceful fright and others twirl. These movements appear as highly choreographed as their stage performance. This film continually blurs distinctions between the performing self and the "natural" self, a blurring which I take to be a quality of expressionistic gesture as well as a stereotype of "feminized" performances.

may, on closer inspection, turn out to be the result of a highly constructed and heavily symbolic performance.[21]

The theories of Soviet filmmakers, such as Lev Kuleshov and Stanislavsky, are helpful for understanding comparatively the complications of a gestural style which may purport to be one thing on paper and then look to be another thing entirely on film. Positions of these theorists help to elucidate the debate which developed in the 1920s throughout Europe and America and for the next several decades about the relative merits of a German expressionist style as opposed to the "nonacting" of certain American, Italian, and French films. Delsarte's methodology was consistently associated with a more constructed, emotionally expressive acting style.

Konstantin Stanislavsky is most known for developing "method" acting, a style which teaches actors to search their interior experience in order to *become* the character. The Method is supposed to be more realistic than earlier melodramatic methods because the actor is not trying to express an emotion, but is experiencing the emotion while portraying it, resulting in a transparent and less heavily coded style. Kuleshov disagreed with Stanislavsky's approach, however, arguing that "one must construct the work of film actors so that it comprises the sum of organized

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[21] Naremore, 99-113.

movement, with 'reliving' held to a minimum."[22] Kuleshov, reflecting the Futurist influence which sees the body as a kind of machine, approaches the film set as a three-dimensional grid. He theorizes an imaginary "metrical spatial web" within which the actor determines the direction and timing of their body. Kuleshov's visualization of a symmetrically fragmented body was directly influenced by Delsarte's work. In an echo of Delsarte's ideas, Kuleshov says that a gestural "task should be broken down into a series of elementary, smaller tasks."[23] But he warns that while Delsarte's techniques are useful "as an inventory of the possible changes in the human mechanism," they are not finally useful as a method for acting.[24] Even though Kuleshov rejected Stanislavsky's approach to bodily performance, he still valued a "natural" or "realistic" acting style. In fact, he chides the Stanislavsky system for producing a large scale, melodramatic gestural style. The irony here is that the "method" claiming to be the most realistic turns out to look equally melodramatic on film. What develops out of these two dramatically different theories and training

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[22] Lev Kuleshov, "The Training of the Actor," *Kuleshov on Film*, trans. Ronald Levaco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 53.

[23] Kuleshov, 54.

[24] Kuleshov, 58.

methods may result in performances which look remarkably the same.

Another important development drawing upon Delsarte, which affects silent film performance style and Lillian Gish's in particular, is the development of modern dance. Isadora Duncan was the first to use Delsarte to make a transition from the salon to major performance halls. She, along with the choreographers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, added drama to ordinary movements and took what is now known as modern dance out of the salon and vaudeville acts and into the category of "high art." These choreographers believed that "In everyday life as well as in the danced representation of life, interior feelings guided the movements of the body into forms that could be identified by the serious student of human movement."[25] Modern dancers in the United States concentrated on movement as a form of self-expression and took their inspiration from "ordinary" movements, ethnic and native dance traditions, and theater. Dancers such as St.Denis and Shawn firmly believed that the body has a language of its own, one that is more closely associated with music than with language, but one that nevertheless could express desire, regret, mourning, ecstasy, without the context of a narrative frame. Modern dance

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[25] Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 157.

training retained the belief that gesture expresses emotion until the 1930s, when a more abstract style was introduced.[26]

Lillian Gish's exposure to Delsarte-influenced modern dance occurred during the late teens when she studied with dancers Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn (the same teachers of Martha Graham). She mentions in her autobiography that when "Miss Ruth" and "Mr. Ted" were away on tour, her mother would rent the studio and she would practice in it. "Within a few years," she says, "my body was to show the effects of all this discipline; it was as trained and responsive as that of a dancer or an athlete."[27] Gish is also mentioned in a 1918 brochure for the Denishawn school as one of several movie stars, such as Louise Brooks and Carole Dempster, who studied with them.[28] The early training that Gish received at Denishawn during the teens would not have been as athletic

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[26] Deborah Jowitt describes one transformation in the image of the woman as dancer between 1900-1930 which turned "the image of the vanguard female dancer from that of a well-fleshed woman with flowing draperies and flowing gestures to that of a forceful, angular, deliberately unglamorous one who wasn't afraid to tackle serious and complex social issues." Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1988),8. See also Marcia Siegel's *The Shapes of Change: Images of American Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1979).

[27] Lillian Gish, *The Movies, Mr. Griffith and Me* (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 100.

[28] Jowitt, 144. She cites the Louis Horst Scrapbooks, Vol. 1. New York Public Library, Dance Collection, Lincoln Center, which also mentions Gish's sister, Dorothy, as having studied at Denishawn.

nor as abstract as the modern dance that emerged at the end of the twenties. Her training, which is evident in *The Wind*, would still retain some of the histrionic gestural expressions of Delsarte, but would look more like the whirling, turning gestures of Duncan and St. Denis than the strident stretching and jumping of Martha Graham.

By the second half of the twenties, Delsarte-influenced performance was out of favor, although its impact remained in both dance and acting. Pearson argues that "Delsarte's enthusiastic American proponents applied the master's precepts to everything from dance to oratory, in the process rendering the system mechanical and artificial, a mere cookbook of theatrical emotion."[29] Although I do not support Pearson's assessment of all Delsarte-influenced dance as being "mechanical and artificial," there is evidence to suggest that some Delsarte-influenced dance, like Delsarte-influenced acting, was perceived by critics as being histrionic, melodramatic, and entirely old-fashioned by the end of the 1920s. A *New York Times* critic reviewing a modern dance performance as late as 1928 describes one negative impact of Delsarte-influenced dance as leading to the "horrific" use of "unrestrained expression of emotion," that results in the following type of performance:

> Its outward manifestations usually consist of rapt faces, backward flung heads, quivering

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[29] Pearson, 22.

> fingers, arms hurled about vehemently and breathing increased in volume as well as tempo.[30]

This description sounds a lot like the histrionic performances that Pearson describes in Biograph films around 1908. And indeed many critics in the twenties and later made the comparison between techniques used by dancers and actors. The *New York Times* writer quoted at the opening of this chapter calls for a kind of dancing/acting which is neither an "abbreviated realism" nor a "wholly stylized concept," but rather a style which "must be complete, compressed, refined, eloquent, but unobtrusive." The kind of expressionistic dancing/acting which this critic is calling for is something in-between Delsartean histrionics, the abstract athleticism of modern dance, and the realism of Pearson's verisimilar code.

A transformation of Delsarte was already apparent in the training that Ted Shawn, one of Gish's teachers, developed out of Delsarte between 1905-1910. Shawn's Delsarte training is not as formulaic as the histrionic style that Pearson identifies in 1908 in Biograph films. Shawn, in a 1910 book on Delsarte, contrasts his own interpretation of Delsarte-influenced dance and gesture with other interpretations:

> One of the vital and important differences lies in the recognition of the torso as the source and main instrument of true emotional expression--and

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[30] *New York Times*, 30 September 1928, xi, 1.

> equally important, the use of successions, beginning in the torso and spreading outwards and downwards throughout the entire body.[31]

Shawn describes a more fluid style of movement than Steele MacKaye's or Genevieve Stebbins's interpretation of Delsartean attitudes. MacKaye and Stebbins emphasized poses, rather than movement in time. The Delsarte-influenced acting style that Pearson identifies as histrionic comes from an interpretation of Delsarte that emphasizes tableau and movements that lead from still pose to still pose. Ted Shawn is using Delsarte in a very different way; the torso generates movement that progresses through "the use of successions" that spread "throughout the entire body." The torso is the seat of emotional expression and one key to a more fluid gestural style that remains expressive without looking "histrionic." In the upcoming analysis of Lillian Gish's movements, the fluid use of the torso will be an important distinguishing marker of a gestural style that reflects its exposure to modern dance.

I believe that a new category of gestural style needs to be named to describe the movements in certain American films of the 1920s, which appear at the level of the signifier to be connected to modern dance techniques. What I shall call *expressionistic gesture* is defined visually by its conflation of the iconic and symbolic meaning of the gesture, yet is not

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[31] Ted Shawn, *Every Little Movement: A Book About Francois Delsarte* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1910), 61.

limited to melodramatic "typing." In other words, a gesture that indicates an emotional reaction, such as the movement of the arm over the head, will also carry with it a certain meaning within a symbolic coding. The arm movement will tend to rise out of a "natural" reaction to circumstances, but it will often be *overcoded*; that is, it bears the weight of more than just a physical action or reaction, it often signifies an emotional reaction that is grounded in the *kinaesthetics* of the Twenties.[32] These gestures are visually similar to the iconography of certain modern dance styles. Expressionistic gesture is more fluid than melodramatic tableau or Delsartean attitudes. Its movements may be more "realistic" or more subtle than early film movement, but expressionistic gesture also carries remnants of Pearson's histrionic code. Arms move away from the body, torsos bend, and eyes still grow wide with emotion, but these types of expressionistic gestures generate a more fluid symbolic code than the histrionic style of prior decades.

Women in Motion, Nationalism, and the Pioneer

Expressionistic gesture developed during the time period following World War I when artists and critics alike were questioning what an *American* art form might look like. Because of the nationlistic sentiments after the war, there

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[32] See Hillel Schwartz, "Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century," *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, Vol. 6, *Zone* series (New York: Zone, 1992).

was a marked resistance to "Germanic" aesthetics, particularly in the film industry. By 1920 with the importation of Ernst Lubitsch's *Passion* (1920) and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, this resistance was starting to break down.[33] Germanic or Teutonic gestural traits were specifically associated, and not always positively, with the expressionism of *Caligari*; for instance, as in the tensed walking style of the somnambulist. David Pratt notes that the American trade press during the early twenties defined "Germanness" as

> a propensity towards turgidness and 'heavy handedness' over delicacy and 'lightness of touch.' It meant the pretentious over the frivolous, the tragic and the melodramatic over the comic, the mechanical over the natural, the premeditated over the spontaneous, the melancholic over the joyful, the vindictive over the merciful, the obvious over the subtle, the direct over the oblique, the exhaustive over the elliptical, the barbaric over the civilized.[34]

Consequently, the qualities of expressionistic gesture and dance were often not specifically identified as having been influenced by a German art movement, but instead were reinvented within an "American" context.

American modern dance, like the American film industry, also demonstrated the "anxiety of influence" of the Germans. Modern dance during the twenties began developing a rhetoric

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[33] David B. Pratt, "'O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou?' *Passion*, the German Invasion and the Emergence of the Name 'Lubitsch,'" *Wide Angle* 13:1 (1992):35.

[34] Pratt, 36.

and choreography connotating "America," even if the new movement quality was reading as "Germanic." Dancers such as Martha Graham experimented with gestural styles of figures like the pioneer woman, the Native American woman, and the Shaker. The end result of these explorations into native gestural and dance styles is a rhetoric of movement that attempts to transform the "Germanic" influence into an embodiment of American nationalism.

Modern Dance (1935), one of the first books on the "new" dance, features discussions by the editors, Virginia Stewart and Merle Armitage, of the "pent up energy and emotions" that the nation felt after World War I which "found its release" in American jazz and German gymnastics, the precursors of modern dance.[35] But drawing connections to war is not the only allusion to a nationalist tone that many dance critics made; they also compared metaphorically the exploration of American topography to certain dance styles. In one of the essays in *Modern Dance*, Paul Love, a dance critic, suggested that "our first response to a strange environment is undoubtedly physical rather than conceptional; and our first expression of it, whether conscious or unconscious will be made in physical terms."[36] A similar rhetoric was apparent in the writings of Isadora Duncan who, in Whitmanesque fashion,

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[35] Virginia Stewart and Merle Armitage, *Modern Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1970), xiii.

[36] Stewart, 45.

consistently drew connections between the dancer, the American landscape, and a national spirit:

> I see America dancing, beautiful, strong, with one foot poised on the highest point of the Rockies, her two hands stretched out from the Atlantic to the Pacific, her fine head tossed to the sky, her forehead shining with a crown of a million stars."[37]

Duncan's dancer is importantly gendered female. Her legs and arms engulf mountains and oceans. She is a vision of a feminized and geographically united American nationalism.

Martha Graham, perhaps more than any other dancer or writer, most fully articulated the figure of the modern dancer as an "American" dancer first and foremost:

> To the American Dancer I say: 'Know our country.' When its vitality, its freshness, its exuberance, its overabundant youth and vigor, its contrasts of plenitude and barrenness are made manifest in movement on the stage, we begin to see the American dance. . . . The dance reveals the spirit of the country in which it takes root. . . .The psyche of the land is to be found in its movement. . . . We move; we do not stand still.[38]

Graham choreographed a number of dances throughout her long career, such as *Frontier* (1935), *American Document* (1939), and *Appalachian Spring* (1944) that expressed "American" themes, even while Graham's dance style was more closely aligned with the traits of German modern dance. Deborah Jowitt explains that by the end of the twenties and continuing into the thirties and World War II, "Being an

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[37] Jowitt, 84.

[38] Stewart, 53.

American dancer meant conveying a sense of immense frontiers and the pioneer hardihood that conquered them."[39] Not only were the dancers themselves labelled as "pioneers" of their art form, but they were attracted to both the iconographic figure of the pioneer woman and the topography of the West.[40] According to Jowitt, these cultural sources "produced an expansiveness of gesture, a sharpness of outline; figures onstage appeared clearly set apart from each other, as if more virtual space than actual space separated them."[41] The dance movements themselves remained large, open and expressive, while the themes of these dances were grounded in theater and narrative. American modern dance had indeed transformed itself into something distinctly different from the German dance, while still maintaining, at the level of gestural quality, obvious links to it.

The movement to represent the iconography of the pioneer woman in American dance was just beginning when Gish made *The Wind* in 1928. A sense of nationalism as illustrated by bodily movement, however, was already a hotly debated topic.

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[39] Jowitt, 137.

[40] In a *New York Times* article, 14 October 1928, x,1, the author notes how often critics praise the skill of Germans, such as Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, but, he criticizes, "We have never been sufficiently proud of our great native schools--of Duncan and St. Denis and the host of others who have grown out of the *pioneering* of these two" [emphasis mine].

[41] Jowitt, 177.

Graham, even as she defined the "American dancer," would specifically set herself apart from what she referred to as the "jingoistic and shortsighted" nature of the "narrow limits of nationalism."[42] But other dancers would not. Helen Tamiris in 1928 printed a "Manifest" in the program of her modern dance performance in New York that declared, "Art is international, but the artist is the product of a nationality and his principal duty to himself is to express the spirit of his race. . . ."[43] This kind of rhetoric was more forcefully articulated in Germany, but it also existed in the United States until World War II, when the more racist rhetoric was squelched and modern dancers began to denounce the German dance and any links to it.[44]

It is important to realize that during the time when *The Wind* was produced in America, a nationalistic rhetoric associated bodily movement, dance, and the iconography of the

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[42] Stewart, 54.

[43] Jowitt, 177.

[44] See Susan Manning's work on the backlash in the United States against transplanted German dancers, such as Hanya Holm, who were forced to disassociate themselves from Mary Wigman during World War II in *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Manning also mentions the existence in the early thirties of a leftist movement in American modern dance which organized working class dancers and protested fascism. The more humanist movement, however, consisting of figures such as Duncan and Graham, comprises the traditional history of modern dance. These dancers were more concerned with justifying their "Americanness" than with getting involved in politics.

pioneer. Gish's role, then, as frontier woman battling a force of nature in order to establish a home would have been a familiar theme for modern dance. Quite possibly it was Gish's involvement with modern dance that encouraged her to adapt the Scarborough book into a film and caused her to describe the book as "pure motion." No matter what the cause, though, the end result of the film is gestural movement that is a visual echo of both themes and gestural styles from the German and American modern dance.

The Wind

During the first half of *The Wind*, Gish's gestural movements remain small, compressed, and close to her body. These smaller movements conform to Pearson's description of the verisimilar code, but during moments of extreme tension in the film, the gestural style of Gish and her fellow actors frequently moves beyond a verisimilar code of movement and transforms itself into a more expressionistic style. Particularly during the second half of the film, gestural style, mise-en-scene, and camera movement all become more expressionistic. In one unusual moment, Letty's subjective point of view is signified by a canted camera angle and expressionistic lighting and gesture. Gish's performance, which she thought at the time was the "best film [she] had ever done,"[45] undergoes a remarkable transformation during

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[45] Gish, 295.

this second half from the restraint of a verisimilar style of acting into symbolically significant expressionistic gesture. During the beginning of the film, however, the viewer witnesses early signs of this transformation as tension builds through an accumulation of small, gestural acts that move away from a verisimilar code and gain symbolic meaning through their repetition.

As Letty arrives in the frontier town and attempts to create a life for herself, she is increasingly confronted by her relationship both to the wind and to men. The wind operates invisibly in the text, although its effects are always visible.[46] Many actions in the film, such as the brushing of sand from clothes, suggest the constant infiltration of the wind into the pioneer way of life. In the opening scene of the film as Letty rides on the train and meets Wirt Roddy, both characters use this brushing gesture several times. Letty is shocked by a lapful of sand which blows through her window and she stands and tries to awkwardly brush it off of her. Her awkwardness is connoted through her open fingers and her weak downward motions across her chest. Roddy witnesses this action and uses it as a

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[46] Seastrom used eight airplane propellers to simulate desert wind. In her autobiography Gish says that this was "one of my worst experiences in filmmaking." She also mentions that "Mr. Griffith . . . would have loved to photograph" the scene where "the landscape was seen through a veil of sand" and Gish and the other cowboys are "bent forward in the saddle as we made our way back to camp" Gish, 292-3.

chance to meet her. He more forcefully brushes the sand from Letty's clothes in an act which suggests his pseudo-gentlemanly intentions. Throughout the film Roddy regularly brushes sand from his own sleeve in a manner which is sophisticated, condescending, and vain. Repeatedly, a character trait is connoted through gestural subtleties that are part of a cultural rhetoric of Western pantomimic knowledge. Roddy's fingers remain close together, his palm perpindicular to his arm as he competently brushes sand from sleeve in short, sharp strokes. Right from the beginning, then, a simple gestural act, such as this brushing, is not merely realistic or verisimilar. It immediately suggests an emotional coding which becomes an important marker of character difference throughout the film.

Later, the brushing gesture is used by two other men who are also suitors of Letty, Lige Hightower, played by Swedish actor Lars Hansen, and his older sidekick, Sourdough. Both men are portrayed through facial and gestural expression as awkward "bumpkins." They notice that Roddy is a more sophisticated competitor; besides his better clothing, the main signifier of his sophistication is the brushing gesture. At the dance where Lige and Sourdough both propose marriage to Letty, both men consciously start to imitate Roddy's brushing gesture in an attempt to appear more "civil." Roddy brushes sand from his clothes when Lige bumps into him. Lige later repeats this gesture after he has married Letty and

brought her home for the first night. Lige, as Roddy later does, attacks Letty, although Lige manages to restrain himself and promises never to touch her again. He also does not brush himself again. This gesture or lack of it, then, at various times connotes attractiveness and aggressiveness. It is important to notice that this brushing also maintains the presence of the wind throughout the characters' interactions with one another.

The tension between characters is also demonstrated through a contrast in gestural style. Cora, the wife of Letty's cousin, Bev, connotes through iconography a negative stereotype of the pioneer woman--hard-working, unromantic, even masculine.[47] Her gestural style is tightly compressed. Her eyes narrow when she looks at Letty. Her lips press together. Her face expresses bitterness, jealousy and at times vulnerability at the sight of Letty and her husband together. In one scene Cora uses a large knife to carve up a cow which hangs from the ceiling. Her arms are covered with blood and, in an unusually open gesture for her, she tries to embrace one of her children. The child recoils at the sight

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[47] Cora's representation is a more negative version of the "frozen goddess" stereotype of a prairie woman. In Ann Uhry Abrams's article, "Frozen Goddess: The Image of Woman in Turn-of-the-Century American Art," she describes this "type" as a woman who remains strong despite a hostile environment. Gish's character of Letty, while not as strong as this stereotype, carries the "goddess" qualities that Cora lacks. In *Women's Places: Female Identity and Vocation in American History*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979): 93-108.

of the blood and rushes over to Letty. Cora slowly brings her arms down and rises, her eyes narrowing with envy. Letty by contrast moves more swiftly to embrace the children. Her actions appear spontaneous, light, and feminine while Cora's appear weighty and forced. Cora's gestures and facial expressions resemble the "heaviness" of a German expressionist style, while Letty's signify the "spontaneity" of the American. Not surprisingly, Cora's actions are the main cause of narrative tension during the first half of the film. It is not until the second half of the film that Letty's movements become more symbolically expressive, although they never assume the anguished intentionality of Cora.

The wind and Letty's reactions to it grow out of and emphasize the tension between characters. In one scene immediately after her arrival at her cousin's house, Letty sits down to dinner with her cousin's family, Lige, and Sourdough. The unpleasantness of the meal is exaggerated for Letty by constant reminders of the wind. Cora's obvious dislike for Letty is demonstrated by her smug looks of disdain and her comment about which part of the cow's innards they were consuming. Gish's acting here is subtle and conforms to the verisimilar code. Letty tries surreptitiously to brush sand from her bread while looking up and half-heartedly smiling. She attempts to look pleasant, while obviously choking on the unappetizing food. Suddenly,

Letty notices the wind blowing sand at the window. Her eyes grow wide in the stare we saw at the beginning of the film, a stare which is histrionic and emotionally expressive. Letty's body leans slightly away from the window. Her gestures are small, but they are something more than verisimilar. Letty's reactions to the wind act as moments of spectacle which temporarily interrupt the narrative.[48] The wind initiates scenes of gestural expressiveness that move beyond the tension generated at the level of the narrative.

In the second half of *The Wind* Gish's gestural style grows more expressionistic, as does the mise-en-scene and camera movement. In the most dramatic scene of the film Gish's movements start to look like an expressionistic dance without becoming simply melodramatic. After Letty is forced to marry Lige she returns to his cabin where she fends off his advances. Lige promises to try to send her home. Letty is terrified of being left alone in the house because of her fear of the wind. She repeatedly looks at the window and the door with large, fearful eyes. Her movements are slow and hesitant, suggesting her fear and sense of entrapment. At the beginning of the final climactic scene, Letty has been left alone in the cabin. A "Norther'" sandstorm is approaching and the sand pounds on the window. Letty circles

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[48] See discussion of the role of spectacle in Tom Gunning's article "The Cinema of Attractions" in the Introduction.

the cabin slowly not knowing what to do. Suddenly, the sand blows through a window and knocks over a lamp, starting a fire. Letty stands paralyzed. Her torso bends her back, her arms stiff, her eyes huge with fear. Then she lunges with her torso leading towards the fire and puts it out. She blocks up the window and then stands in the middle of the room weaving back and forth on her feet, as if about to faint. Suddenly, the camera assumes her perspective, tilting up and down within a canted frame. The light angles across the barely lit room and the curtains blow wildly. The total effect mimics the expressionistic technique of a subjective viewpoint, which is contradicted as the camera pans around, still canted, to include Letty in the scene again.

At this point she hears a knocking on the door, and hoping it is Lige, she collapses into the arms of the man who enters the room. The man turns out to be Roddy. Letty charges to the open front door, bent at the waist, her left arm stretched straight over her head, fingers extended, her right arm enclosing her head and grabbing onto her left elbow. Her body is tense and angular. The wind throws her back across the room. She rushes again outside and the wind twists her body and turns her against the house. She is forced back inside where she collapses onto her bed, and then, as the viewer infers through the symbolic juxtaposition of the roaring wind, Roddy rapes her. Gish's gestures leading up to the rape are motivated by the force of the wind-

-a "natural" reaction, but the specifics of her movements resemble movements that are typical of modern dance in the twenties. She leads with her torso and it tilts her body forwards and backwards as she runs into the wind and then away from it. Her arms are used to extend her body. Her fingers spread apart to emphasize her reach. Gish's use of her torso to initiate movement throughout the rest of her body is reminiscent of Shawn's Delsarte-influenced training style. Her combination of grace, extension, and emotional expression all support Naremore's assessment of Gish cited at the opening of this chapter that Gish demonstrates "a quality of delicacy mixed with strength that have been learned in a dancing class."

In the next scene, the wind has died down and Gish's movements have calmed down with it. We see Roddy putting on his belt as Gish sits in a chair with her back to the camera. The camerawork here especially adds to the sense of Letty's emotional distress without resorting to histrionics. By filming from a high angle and behind, the viewer notices the stiffness of Gish's posture and her lack of movement. She then stands with her back still to the camera and walks evenly to the window. Roddy then tries to force Letty to come with him and she shoots him when he approaches her. After she has killed Roddy, Letty's movements again assume more dance-like qualities, as she battles the wind to bury Roddy outside in the storm. She furiously shovels sand over

his body. When she goes back inside the cabin, the camera shoots from outside the window to show Letty's fright and horror as the wind uncovers Roddy's body. Letty claws at the window, her face and horrific expression framed in a way that suggests her imprisonment and again visually resembles expressionistic mise-en-scene.

In the original ending of the film, Letty rushes back outside to die in the storm. But, after being pressured by distributors, Irving Thalberg decided to change the ending of the film. Consequently, the tension and expressionistic feel of the film, which had built up to Letty's suicide in the original ending of the film, is undermined by the optimistic replacement ending. In the new ending Letty reconciles with Lige, declares her love and devotion to him as a wife and the two of them stand facing the wind together as Letty says "I'm not afraid of the wind anymore." Ideologically speaking, even though she is quite obviously in many ways a dependent wife, the final shot of the film gesturally connotes the survival spirit that was one of the more positive aspects of images of the female pioneer. We see a full body view of Letty as she stands in front of Lige and faces the open door. They are both leaning into the wind, but are standing firmly on the ground. Gish's face is tilted upwards and her hair streams out behind her, as she declares her fear of the wind to be conquered.

In *The Wind* we find a filmic example of one type of American pioneer spirit embodied by the gestural expressions of a woman in motion. Gish's facial and gestural movements demonstrate connections to the expressionistic ideology of the 1920s. Her expressionistic gestures are defined visually by how they embody and exteriorize emotion in a way that is less histrionic than earlier film melodramas, but not as realistic or verisimilar as other styles of acting. Expressionistic gesture, as long as it was not explicitly associated with German Expressionism or dance, was seen as an appropriate vehicle in the late twenties for conveying a sense of American movement, character, and landscape. Expressionistic gesture had moved beyond the posing of its Delsartean beginnings and transformed itself into a visual style that complemented both modern dancers and film actors. But the expressionistic gesture that we find in *The Phantom of the Opera* or *The Wind* was a fairly short-lived experiment in film style. It quickly evaporates with the introduction of sound and all of the limitations that sound technology placed on gestural movement. *The Wind* is one of the last American silent films to make such successful use of an expressionistic and "dance-like" gestural style.

CHAPTER 4
THE AMERICAN CHORUS GIRL IN WEIMAR GERMANY: LOUISE BROOKS, *PANDORA'S BOX*, AND KRACAUER'S "THE MASS ORNAMENT"

> These products of American 'distraction factories' are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble female units whose movements are mathematical demonstrations.[1]

In *Lulu in Hollywood* Louise Brooks recounts a telling confrontation that occurred during the production of *Pandora's Box*, a moment that attests to the power that star persona plays in cinematic reception. Brooks remembers leaving another UFA film opening in 1928 with her director, George W. Pabst, when a woman in the crowd apparently spoke hostilely to Brooks in German. Brooks demanded that Pabst translate. Reluctantly, he repeated the woman's accusation: "That is the American girl who is playing our German Lulu!"[2] Perhaps this anecdote helps to explain why *Pandora's Box* and Brooks's performance in it were panned by the general public before they were praised by critics. This anonymous woman's reaction suggests how nationalist fervor had entered into the

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[1] Siegfried Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," trans. Barbara Cornell and Jack Zipes, *New German Critique* 5 (1975).

[2] Louise Brooks, *Lulu in Hollywood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 95.

realm of cultural activities, including cinematic reception, by the end of the Weimar years. Her figure also necessarily brings in the neglected issue of the female spectator, whose potentially different reaction to Weimar cinema has rarely been considered.

Why did Pabst select an American actress, a former Ziegfeld girl, to play in an otherwise very German production? Why did he not select Marlene Dietrich who vigorously sought the part? According to Brooks, Pabst later said of Dietrich, that she "was too old and too obvious--one sexy look and the picture would become a burlesque."[3] Pabst sought a contrast to the "heavier" performance style of German expressionism.[4] By the time Pabst had adapted Wedekind's expressionist play *Die Buchse der Pandora* to film, *Pandora's Box* was not so much an example of expressionism as a comment about expressionism, although certain elements of the mise-en-scene, such as lighting, sets, and particularly, the gestural style, retain expressionist elements. According to Thomas Elsaesser, Pabst "cites" expressionism, but he by no means endorses it. The character of Lulu in Wedekind's version is "characterized by her expressivity, because she is

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[3] Brooks, 96.

[4] For a discussion on how German acting was perceived in the United States as "heavy", "pretentious", and "mechanical" see David Pratt, "O, Lubitsch, Where Wert Thou? *Passion*, the German Invasion and the Emergence of the Name 'Lubitsch'," *Wide Angle* 13.1 (1991): 34-71.

conceived in response to a societal repressivity."[5] However, the choice of Louise Brooks, an American film actress whose facial expressions, at least, were by no means like those of other more expressive German actresses, subverts her character's formulaic femme fatale nature. Instead of Wedekind's femme fatale, Brooks gives us a naughty, American Flapper--a stunning contrast to the seriously expressionistic acting of her German costars. Lulu dances through the film because she feels like it, not because a specific emotional intensity obviously motivates her. Her bodily movement is as memorable as her vague facial expressions because Pabst visually choreographed her character as much as he directed it. As Elsaesser concludes, Pabst's choice of Brooks supported his visual critique of expressionist ideology by foregrounding "American filmacting--neutral, minimal, pure surface and exteriority--the interface of sexuality and technology as it was present in Louise Brooks, not least thanks to her training as a dancer in the Ziegfeld Follies."[6]

Pabst apparently had no idea of Brooks's training as a dancer when he selected her as his version of Lulu, but he was delighted when he found out. Brooks states in her autobiography that for Lulu's character, "dancing was her mode of expression" and, quoting a line from the script which

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[5] Thomas Elsaesser, "Lulu and the Meter Man: Louise Brooks, Pabst and *Pandora's Box*," *Screen* 24.4-5 (1983): 12.

[6] Elsaesser, "Lulu and the Meter Man," 28.

she claims to have never thoroughly read: "In my despair I dance the Can-Can."[7] The death of Lulu, former chorus girl, does not seem such a long way, discursively speaking, from Brooks's own experience as Ziegfeld girl and failed Hollywood starlet. The enigma of the American chorus girl in Germany does not just appear in *Pandora's Box* or Louise Brooks's biographies. Nor does Elsaesser's identification of Brooks's chorus girl background with the conflation of "sexuality and technology" appear only in recent criticism. The American chorus girl abroad carried a wide cultural currency during the Weimar years and into the thirties.[8] Her figure appears most prominently in another text written during this period, although with very different implications. Siegfried Kracauer's article on "The Mass Ornament," first published in 1927, takes the figure of the American chorus girl as a representation of the kind of deceptively benign mass spectacle that capitalism introduces into society.

Kracauer appropriates the figure of the dancer to initiate a phenomenological approach to culture, an approach which ties the dancer, specifically the "chorus girl", to

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[7] Brooks, 101.

[8] Although a comprehensive study of the cross-Atlantic effects of chorus girl revues has yet to be done, see Derek and Julia Parker, *The Natural History of the Chorus Girl* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975); Peter Bailey, "Naughty but Nice: Muscial Comedy and the Rhetoric of the Girl, 1892-1914" in Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan, eds. *The Edwardian Theatre: Studies in Performance and the Stage* (London: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

factory lines, film audiences, and military parades. He uses this chorus girl, which he takes to be particularly an American product, to reveal "truths" about late Weimar culture. The debate surrounding Kracauer's work in *The Mass Ornament*, especially the titular article, has not centered on the particular question of the figure of the chorus girl, although critics have begun to use Kracauer's writings from the 1920s to reframe some of the conclusions in *From Caligari to Hitler* which seem too telescopic.[9] Kracauer's writings following World War II tend to funnel observations about German film before the war through an Oedipal scenario which finally "explains" the fascist impulse. Kracauer identifies in certain Weimar texts a failed masculine subjectivity, one that repeatedly succumbs to patriarchal authority, seeks out maternal comfort, and is represented as weak and "feminized," sexually as well as economically frustrated.[10] Kracauer's reading of Weimar film narratives implies at certain points that if only Weimar male subjectivity had been able to move more correctly through the Oedipal journey, in other words, if only the Weimar male had been more "masculine," then the seeds of Nazism would not have found as "fertile" a place to flourish.

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[9] See particularly the debate in *New German Critique* 5 (1975); 40 (1987).

[10] Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947).

Recent books, such as Patrice Petro's *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*, are pointing out how Kracauer's use of the Oedipal argument excludes other points of view, such as the response of the female spectator, and other genres of Weimar film, such as the *Kammerspiel* or street film melodrama. Petro, using Luce Irigaray's analysis of Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, argues that most critics of Weimar cinema "remain caught within. . . . 'the blind spot of an old dream of symmetry'" which "makes distinctions without differences by repeatedly conflating narrative with national identity, national identity with subject, and all three terms with male subjectivity and male identity in crisis."[11] Petro's criticism also applies to Kracauer's use of the chorus girl in "The Mass Ornament," but with an important distinction. In "The Mass Ornament" symmetrical design itself is investigated as an important organizational strategy of capitalism, a critique which is similar to Irigaray's deconstruction of patriarchal discourses, including capitalism. The problem in "The Mass Ornament" is that the design of the chorus girl seems to blind Kracauer to the inherent issues of sexual difference that she provokes. The

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[11] Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), xvii-iii. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

American chorus girl inevitably bears the representational burden of a sexually and economically neutered Weimar subjectivity. However, I find Kracauer's writings during the 1920s and 30s to be somewhat more ambivalent and open than his conclusions in *From Caligari to Hitler*.[12] Even though he is generally negative about female spectatorship, in "The Mass Ornament" and other writings during this period, Kracauer allows for the possibility of a potentially radical form of spectatorship.

I wish to approach "The Mass Ornament" from a perspective which considers both the implications of the female spectator and the specificity of the historical background of the chorus dancer in Germany and the United States during the Weimar years and into the thirties. Louise Brooks's performance in *Pandora's Box* provides an opportunity to uphold as well as to challenge some of Kracauer's conclusions about the abstracted and fragmented nature of the female dancer. Brooks also gives us a particular example of what happens when the signifier of the American chorus girl enters into the context of the crisis of German masculine identity. Before I approach the film, however, I will first

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12 Other writers, such as Elsaesser, also point to Kracauer's work before the war as a less apologetic description of the symptoms of a culture's "unconscious," an analysis which remains more intricately tied to the implications of capitalism than to Freudianism. See Thomas Elsaesser, "Cinema--The Irresponsible Signifier or 'The Gamble with History': Film Theory or Cinema Theory," *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 86.

fully outline Kracauer's argument related to the American chorus dancer and consider it next to both the historical phenomenon of the chorus dancer in film and other discursive conclusions about the chorus girl written during the late twenties. I will then examine the conflicted nature of Brooks's star persona and how her association as American Flapper and "Ziegfeld girl" is important to the role of Lulu. Finally, I will analyze how Pabst's direction of Brooks's Lulu undermines the typical cinematic fragmentation of the dancer's body and, at the same time, reveals certain qualities about the mass ornament that Kracauer dismisses.

The Mass Ornament

Kracauer's 1927 article explains the mass ornament through a process which is similar to the reading grid that I discuss in my introduction. Kracauer begins his introduction discussion of the mass ornament by establishing the legitimacy of his phenomenological approach. He argues that the "simple surface manifestations" of a culture "allows for direct access to the underlying meaning of existing conditions" and then shifts immediately to discussing "changes" in the "field of physical culture."[13] A recent

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[13] I use the term "chorus girl" in this chapter as a broad designation to include any dancer who appears on stage in a chorus, although I am particularly interested in a certain American chorus girl who appeared as a discursive phenomenon during the twenties and into the thirties. Following Kracauer, I do not include ballet or modern dance in this category. Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 67.

"change," he argues, was initiated by the Tiller Girls and their performances in stadiums and on screens throughout the world. Kracauer explicitly sets up reading grid which establishes a correlation between "simple surface manifestations," the American chorus girl, and her ability to "access" directly the subterranean depths of Weimar culture.

The chorus girl is not about sex, but design. It is not the Tiller girls' eroticism that allows for an understanding of "existing conditions," whether economic, cultural, or psychological; on the contrary, it is the "ornamental" nature of these performances that transforms the "Girls" into "sexless bodies in bathing suits" and the audience into their mirror-like reflection, "arranged in row upon ordered row." The interest of the mass ornament for Kracauer is only as a dehumanized and abstracted pattern. The Tiller Girls are not eroticized, as Kracauer argues the ballet dancer remains, but rather, they are a part of "a linear system which no longer has erotic meaning but at best points to the place where the erotic resides."[14] A line-up of chorus girls performing high kicks exposes the "place" of sexual difference, but this exposure, for Kracauer at least, is not erotic. While other writers, choreographers and filmmakers during this same

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[14] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 68. Kracauer suggests that in its early history the ballet also demonstrated formations that were organized according to the principle of the mass ornament, but that, unlike the chorus girl, ballet dancers "remained still the plastic formation of the erotic life which gave rise to them and determined their traits,"68.

period were equally fascinated with "girls" in abstract formations, not all of them were willing to deny the obvious erotic attraction that these performances held for a masculine spectator.

The Tiller girls were part of a larger international phenomenon that was associated first with travelling troupes, then with the spectacular Ziegfeld performances, and finally with film.[15] The American chorus girl carried the widest reputation for pure spectacle, largely due to the initiative of Florenz Ziegfeld and Busby Berkeley who transformed the titillation of burlesque into a visual kaleidoscope of female body parts. According to Rick Altman, Ziegfeld, above all other entertainment producers, was "responsible for the show musical's tendency to deemphasize individual talent and to concentrate interest on the visual patterning of costumes and bodies."[16] The almost childlike androgyny of the chorus girl is explained partially by Ziegfeld's claim in 1915 to have

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[15] The Tiller girls were actually British in origin, even though Kracauer mistakenly identifies them as "American." Stylistically they were very similar to American chorus girls in the precision and symmetry of their movements. For the purposes of this essay, I take Kracauer's mistake at face value. It is the cultural associatation that he makes with "Americanness" that is important here.

[16] Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 204. Ziegfeld and other promoters selected a body tyhpe that was slimmer, more athletic and more symmetrical than other stage dancers. The body type of the Ziegfeld girl stands in stark contrast to the 200 lb. burlesque dancer that some promoters preferred at the end of the nineteeth century. See Parker, 24.

"invented the showgirl, and therefore like any other inventor, am qualified to discuss and analyze the child of my brain." Paternity establishes an uneasy relationship with the performing child/daughter, a discomfort that is visible in the complicated relationship to eroticism that the chorus girl also demonstrates. As Linda Mizejewski points out about Ziegfeld's comment, "if paternity alone can produce the child, the female body itself can be disavowed and then reconstituted as the displaced, purely voyeuristic figure, the showgirl."[17]

Kracauer was not the only writer to describe the "visual patterning" of female bodies as a particularly American phenomenon. In a 1925 article in *The New Republic* entitled "The Follies as an Institution" Edmund Wilson describes the Ziegfeld girl and hints at their racist associations:

> In general, Ziegfeld's girls have not only the Anglo-Saxon straightness--straight backs, straight brows and straight noses--but also the peculiar frigidity and purity, the frank high-school girlishness which Americans like. He does not aim to make them, from the moment they appear, as sexually attractive as possible, as the Folies-Bergere, for example, does. He appeals to American idealism, and then, when the male is intent on his chaste and dewy-eyed vision, he gratifies him on this plane by discreetly disrobing his goddess.[18]

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[17] Linda Mizejewski, "Ziegfeld Girl: Image and Icon in Culture and Cinema," (unpublished manuscript, 1993): 3-4.

[18] Edmund Wilson, "The Follies as an Institution," *American Earthquake: A Documentary of the Twenties and Thirties*, (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1958), 125-6. Also quoted in Barry Paris, *Louise Brooks* (London: Mandarin Books, 1989), 81.

Wilson does not deny, as Kracauer does, that the American chorus girl appeals at least on some level as erotic spectacle to a male voyeur; however, he also identifies an element of sexlessness that is particularly "American." Wilson sounds even more like Kracauer when he argues that the Ziegfeld girls do not demonstrate "the movement and abandon of emotion, but what the American male really regards as beautiful: the efficiency of mechanical movement."

The associations between "mechanical movement" and American chorus girls are not simply phenomenological observation. One of Ziegfeld's favorite choreographers, Busby Berkeley, got his start in 1917 by training the 79th Division of the U.S. Army in France how to perform military drills without using vocal commands. He was not so much a choreographer as an expert on synchronized movement and bodily design. Berkeley's drill routines were so popular that the military made his technique into classified information.[19] Berkeley transferred his love of military precision into the ranks of the Hollywood chorus line--a technique that Ziegfeld also relished. But contrary to Kracauer's observations about the lack of eroticism of the Tiller girls, in the American musical films done by Ziegfeld and Berkeley, the militaristic enthusiasm of chorus girl line-ups more often than not is transferred into the excesses of

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[19] Parker, 167.

female eroticism. The disciplined, military body becomes the repository for masculine visual fantasy with themes and costumes that mix and match signifiers of ethnic exoticism, lesbian playfulness, and domestic culture.

Certain camerawork in these American films attempts superficially to "personalize" the masses of chorus girls by separating out individual dancers from the crowd. Berkeley, for example, liked to use close-ups of the dancers' faces. According to Derek and Julia Parker in *The Natural History of the Chorus Girl*, Berkeley was the man "who taught the camera how to look at girls:"

> If it was possible, now, for a director to use girls as wallpaper or carpeting, it was also possible for him to bring an individual member of the audience into close contact with each individual member of the chorus: the camera learned to linger lovingly a foot or two away, before moving on to the next beauty; and one or other of them would have their effect.[20]

This technique of close-up after close-up of female faces also reinforced an ideology of type: the white, standardized face of beauty, but rather than making the chorus girl less abstract, it only seemed to make her more.[21]

It was not only in the United States that filmmakers such as Berkeley built a connection between the mise-en-scenes of military, industrial, and consumer culture and

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[20] Parker, 164, 167.

[21] See Mizejewski's discussion of the discourse of eugenics during the teens and twenties and their connection to Ziegfeld's philosophy of girl "types."

chorus girls on stage. But because of the nationalistic undertones of these numbers, other countries, such as Germany, project their own national iconography onto the female body in distinctly different ways. Karsten Witte has noted how fascist aesthetics are apparent in the German Revue films of the thirties and how not only do the dancers themselves mimic the movements of the German soldiers, but also the editing of the dance numbers tends to reproduce the Fascist aesthetic of "restraint." In a 1936 document which Witte quotes on "the self-concept of fascist aesthetics of the dance," one German author summarizes this aesthetic:

> The tendency toward abstraction, the urge to an impersonal law speaks out of the composition of the dances [of the Germans] as well as out of the manner with which he has not only conquered his world, but also organized and ordered it. Coolness, clarity and economy of motion bespeak an aversion toward merely untamed ecstasy.[22]

Witte sees this attitude as underlying the "inhibition of visual pleasure" that is evident in the films of German chorus dancers. The movements of the dancers, the verticality and rigidity of how they are framed by the camera all demonstrate the uncomfortable restraint of the Fascist body. "That is why the fragmented dancers are so hastily reassembled by the cutting technique, as if it had to be

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[22] Karsten Witte, "Visual Pleasure Inhibited: Aspects of the German Revue Film," *New German Critique* 24-25 (1981-82): 244.

ashamed of every jump, every excursion into daydreaming, in short: of the dancing conquest of erotic fantasy."[23]

On the other hand, American dance films, according to Witte, were visually organized on the horizontal, expanding a sense of visual excess, rather than restraining it.[24] The visual organization of films such as Berkeley's *The Golddiggers of 1933*, which was banned by the German Reich, does not suggest that dance has conquered fantasy, but rather that erotic fantasy has taken over the dance. In another American dance musical, *Dames*, Berkeley most clearly demonstrates this "takeover" when he uses clock gears for headboards--a weird, but obvious connection between sexuality and the technology of the machine.[25] Berkeley makes links at the level of the dreamlike signifier, and not at the level of narrative. A clock on musical-favorite Dick Powell's desk turns into a field of clocks against a black background. The clocks spin around to reveal the gears of the headboards.

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[23] Witte, 257.

[24] Witte, 257.

[25] Lucy Fischer argues in her article on *Dames* that the "magical" quality of Berkeley's editing techniques, costumes and stage designs are ideologically "bound to the mysteries of the reproductive process." See "The Image of the Woman as Image: the Optical Politics of *Dames*," *Sexual Strategems: The World of Women in Film* (New York: Horizon Press, 1979): 47. For another discussion that ties sexuality, technology and mechanical female movement to anxiety over female reproduction see Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *New German Critique* 24-25 (1981-1982).

The beds expand visually to left and right, filling the audience's visual field with women in bed with another. Berkeley repeatedly moves from the concrete detail to the world of erotic fantasy via these signifying chains.

American erotic fantasy, unlike the concrete restraint of the German revue films, is displaced onto other ideologies, particularly the visual economy of industrialization and the machine. Kracauer makes the implications of this displacement most explicit in this quote from "Girls und Krise":

> They were not only American products, they simultaneously demonstrated American production. When they formed an undulating line, they illustrated radiantly the virtues of the conveyor belt; when they tap-danced in rapid tempo, it sounded like "business, business"; when they kicked their legs high with mathematical precision, they joyously affirmed the advances of rationalization; and when they kept doing the same thing over and over again without ever breaking the line, one could see before the mind's eye an uninterrupted chain of cars gliding out of the factory yards into the world.[26]

Kracauer describes the visual iconography of American exports, whether they are cars or "girls," as a repetition of glamorized sameness and the colonizing zeal of capitalism, an iconography and ideology that is displaced onto and transformed by the German spectator who is pleased, troubled, and distracted by American spectacle.

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[26] Siegfried Kracauer, "Girls und Krise," *Frankfurter Zeitung* (27 April 1931), as quoted in Witte, 240.

In "The Mass Ornament" Kracauer concentrates on explaining the links between the visual logic of the chorus girl and the logic of capitalism. The Tiller Girls are governed by the same kind of "rationality" that organizes capitalist production lines. "The hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls."[27] Body parts move rhythmically and are important only in the fragmented sense of a part which enables a design. The repetitive actions of the hands of the factory worker require the same kind of narrowly focused, mentally paralyzing concentration as the legs of the chorus girl. For Kracauer the mass ornament is merely an "aesthetic reflex of the rationality aspired to by the prevailing economic system."[28] The problem with this type of rationality resides in the fact that it is not the result of a thoughtful historical process. The mass ornament, more akin in Kracauer's metaphors to an involuntary physical reflex, demonstrates in its superficial inevitability that "Capitalism dos not rationalize too much but *too little*," and thereby results in abstract, "ambivalent" thinking which, like the mass ornament, produces a "false, mythological concreteness."[29] The Tiller Girls embody in their aestheticized and deeroticized formal beauty,

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[27] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 70.

[28] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 70.

[29] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 72-73.

the false concreteness that inhibits truly rational thinking, the kind of thinking that "demythologizes" history.

In his writings before the war, unlike much of his later work, Kracauer does leave room for some sign of breaking through the oppressiveness of the mass ornament. In fact, he argues against those "intellectuals" who snub the Tiller Girl phenomenon by suggesting that the "aesthetic plesure" of the performance "is *legitimate*."[30] This type of pleasure, he suggests, is potentially more radical than artworks which "cultivate obsolete noble sentiments in withered forms" because they are less connected to "reality" than the working class pleasures of the Tiller Girls. Certain types of "*rhythmical gymnastics*" or modern dance which attempt to add meaning to bodily form are even worse than the chorus girl revues, according to Kracauer, because these more "spiritual" forms "confiscate even the mythological higher levels and hence strengthen nature all the more in its domination."[31] The formations of the Tiller Girls, however, resemble iconographically the working conditions of the factory lines. For Kracauer such a visual confrontation with "reality"

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30 Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 70.

31 Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 76. Kracauer's distrust of "spiritual" dance does not help to explain why Goebbels found certain types of "philosophical" dance, such as the modern dance of Mary Wigman, so threatening that he banned it from inclusion in UFA films in 1937. See Susan A. Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 202.

carries within it the potential for a radical experience of contradiction which leads to the kind of historically grounded thinking that Kracauer sees in the folk tale.

I wish to come back to Kracauer's point about the radical potential of the visual pleasure of the Tiller Girl because I believe it opens up his argument to a consideration of sexually differentiated spectatorship as well as to a more complex consideration of the figure of the dancer. First, however, it is necessary to deal with those places where Kracauer does identify a sexually specific spectator, and with how he generally approaches mass culture.

Kracauer assumes that it is, in fact, the audience which brings meaning to the mass ornament. The dancers are incapable of appreciating the symmetry of their collective performance. The dancer, like the individual spectator, is meaningless alone; the sense or logic of the performance is constructed through sheer numbers. Through Kracauer's analogy, the spectator becomes as sexless and abstracted as the dancer.

Kracauer, like other cultural critics, often resorts to metaphors which feminize in a negative fashion both the spectacle and the spectator. He characterizes the "nature" that both capitalism and the mass ornament allow for as "primitive," "mute," "impenetrable."[32] The masses that are

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[32] Kracauer, "The Mass Ornament," 74.

the "bearers of the patterns" of the ornament are "swallowed up" by its physicality. This terminology is typical of the feminization of the consumers of mass culture who are characterized as a giant engulfing mass of sentimental emotions, ruled by identification and passion rather than separation and critical thought.[33] These same metaphors are often used, according to Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination* to describe the qualities of melodrama, another feminized genre that expresses emotion through mute gesture as well as an underlying nostalgia for some kind of lost utopian completeness.[34]

Connections between the chorus girl and the melodrama may not be as unlikely as they first seem. The chorus girl, like the prostitute, was often a popular character choice for narratives in which the female character's actions lead to disaster. The melodrama exposes the questionable visual pleasure of the symmetry and logic of the chorus line as well as the sexual differences between spectator reactions. In Rouben Mamoulian's *Applause* (1929), for example, the director focuses on burlesque dancers who are not arranged in

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[33] For an important article on this topic see Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski, Theories of Contemporary Culture, vol.7 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986): 188-207.

[34] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, and the Mode of Excess* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

perfectly symmetrical order. Mamoulian also includes close-up reaction shots of chorus girl and spectator. The reluctant chorus girl, April Darling, wears an expression of vulnerability and fear while dancing on stage; the mostly male audience members display exaggerated leers. The narrative concludes with April's "escape" from the questionable moral life of the stage by marrying a sailor. *Applause* is a good example of a chorus girl narrative that might in fact involve the pleasure of the female spectator in ways that are quite different from a Busby Berkeley film.[35] *Pandora's Box* is another example where an American chorus girl is separated from her chorus and foregrounded cinematically as the object of a scopophilic gaze, only in this film she is planted in the midst of melodramatic German angst and her "performances" result in her death.[36]

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[35] Jeffrey P. Smith mentions in his article on *Applause* that the former burlesque dancers that Mamoulian hired were delighted to be back on stage and did not seem insulted in the least in how they were portrayed. Their pleasure in being on stage, according to Smith, complicates the scopophilic gaze. Jeffrey P. Smith, "It Does Something to a Girl. I Don't Know What': The Problem of Female Sexuality in *Applause*," *Cinema Journal* 30.2 (1991): 47-60; See also Lucy Fischer, "*Applause*: The Visual and Acoustic Landscape," in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985): 232-246

[36] In *Applause* there is also a death. April's mother, an aging burlesque dancer, kills herself so that her daughter will not work to support her. The inclusion of a mother figure is unusual for this film genre. The chorus girl is nearly always guided by a patriarchal teacher, producer, lover figure.

Kracauer does not consider how a melodrama's portrayal of a chorus girl might provide a critique of the mass ornament, either through the narrative and cinematic qualities of the film, or through the possible visual pleasure of the female spectator. In another article written before the war, Kracauer is more overtly sexist in his remarks about the female spectator position and her relationship to the modern spectator phenomenon of "diversion" that the mass ornament brings about. Kracauer's "The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies" characterizes the naivete of the shopgirl and her close identification with what she sees on the screen in highly negative terms. "The little shopgirls have a hard time resisting the glamor of marches and uniforms," he writes. "If the little shopgirls are approached by a strange gentleman this night, they probably think he is one of the famous millionaires."[37] Sabine Hake points out in "Girls and Crisis--The Other Side of Diversion" that Kracauer's concept of "diversion" as a specifically modern form of feminized spectatorship hints at an underlying pessimism or "hidden conservatism" in his feelings towards the mass ornament and the female spectator.[38] But they also reveal an important contradiction. In writing

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[37] Quoted in Sabine Hake, "Girls and Crisis--The Other Side of Diversion," *New German Critique* 40 (1987): 159,160.

[38] Hake, 162. Se also Heide Schlupmann, "Phenomenology of Film: On Siegfried Kracauer's Writing of the 1920s" *New German Critique* 4 (1987): 97-114.

about the "little shopgirls" he describes a spectator who is not watching in the superficial and fragmented style of diversion, but one who watches with total absorption; however, because of this absorption, the shopgirl is not capable of experiencing the radical potential of diversion. According to Hake, these changes in Kracauer's position towards diversion and the mass ornament are symptomatic of his own ambivalent feelings about the female spectator:

> Thus diversion oscillates between a progressive demystification and a regressive incantation of the threatening aspects of decline and, thus, is always in danger of being dominated by idealistic concepts of law versus order, immersion versus distraction. Kracauer's belief in a radicalization through diversion ignores precisely the regressive aspects; in so doing he also represses the sensual side of the cinema (as preserved in the term scopophilia). Again, the position of the feminine proves to be fatal; not only to the prospects of the theory itself, but to the possibility of changing society."[39]

The figure of the feminized spectacle is as inherently unstable as the position of the female or feminized spectator. The Tiller Girl as mass ornament is only potentially demystifying when she is deeroticized through symmetry; at the same time, it is this symmetry and its abstractness that reinforces the mythological nature of capitalism. Either way, female spectacle is dehumanized and desexualized in service to a theory which contains its own

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[39] Hake, 163-4.

self-destruction. And, as Hake notes, the cause of this destruction is often the feminine.

The fatal position of woman in relation to culture plays an integral role in another product of Weimar culture, George W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* (1928). In this film we find again the figure of the chorus girl who, abstracted as she is through framing, editing, and acting style, seems to lead inevitably to disaster and death. Is this what happens to the chorus girl when she is separated from her chorus? When the ornament is separated from its pattern and transformed into flesh and blood? Are Kracauer's fears about the mass ornament played out in melodramatic form in *Pandora's Box*? And if they are, is there any sign of the potentially radical nature of the mass ornament as well?

Louise Brooks in *Pandora's Box*

> I learned how to act by watching Martha Graham dance.[40]

A number of critics have commented recently on film studies' perhaps overly involved infatuation with Louise Brooks's performances in Pabst's *Diary of a Lost Girl* and in *Pandora's Box*. Lotte Eisner describes in *The Haunted Screen* "the miracle of Louise Brooks," whose "gifts of profound intuition may seem purely passive to an inexperienced audience." According to Eisner, Brooks is an "an actress who needed no directing, but could move across the screen causing the work

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[40] Louise Brooks, quoted in Paris, 40.

of art to be born by her mere presence."[41] Likewise Henri Langlois of the Cinematheque Francaise said of Brooks in 1955:

> She is the modern actress par excellence because, like the statues of antiquity, she is outside of time . . . She has the naturalness that only primitives retain before the lens . . . She is the intelligence of the cinematographic process, she is the most perfect incarnation of *photogenie*; she embodies in herself all that the cinema rediscovered in its last years of silence: complete naturalness and complete simplicity.[42]

Patrice Petro has questioned this kind of praise that critics have levied at both Brooks and Marlene Dietrich, two actresses whose careers in Germany were only beginning at the end of the Weimar period. Petro suggests that "this kind of retrospective reading would seem to reveal as much about a fascination exerted by a certain type of woman in contemporary scholarship as it does about the figure of woman in the late Weimar period."[43] While I agree that, to some extent, critics such as Eisner and Langlois appear to have been seduced by the subtlties of Brooks's performance, I also

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[41] Lotte Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Film and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Roger Greaves, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969): 296.

[42] Paris, 312.

[43] Petro, 160. Mary Ann Doane also remarks on the critical focus on Brooks as a star performer and suggests that this focus challenges the negative reviews of Brooks as a "passive" actress. See her chapter "The Erotic Barter: Pandora's Box" in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Routledge Press, 1991), 152-153.

believe that Brooks's persona as much as her performance makes her a compelling figure through which to discuss the site of the American chorus girl in Weimar Germany. And the startling juxtaposition of Brooks's Lulu next to her German costars disturbs the filmic text in such a way that critics return again and again to *Pandora's Box* to unravel the implications of Brooks's performance and Pabst's direction.

In order to discuss the complexitites of the chorus girl and its relation to Kracauer's concept of the mass ornament, I will take Louise Brooks's performance in *Pandora's Box* as a starting point. However, I will also consider Brooks as a star persona that disturbs the text of the film and intertextually brings in the related figures of the American chorus girl and the Flapper. I take the chorus girl to be more than just a "simple surface manifestation" that reveals the superficial mythos of capitalist production or the crisis in Germanic masculine identity. The history of the chorus girl during the 1920s complicates Kracauer's conclusions about the abstract nature of the mass ornament. Louise Brooks's experience as modern dancer, Ziegfeld girl, American starlet, and Flapper icon allows me to set up in a different form the implications and effects of these types of figures and performance styles within *Pandora's Box*.

When Brooks first began to make films, her "naturalistic" acting talents were immediately praised in Hollywood, as they would be in *Pandora's Box*, and early on

Brooks seems to have been aware that she did not follow what she describes as the "mugging" school of acting style, where an actor chooses "expression #7 of a grinning leer."[44] In her retrospective comments on an interview with *Photoplay* magazine in April 1926, Brooks also emphasized the importance of her background as a dancer. She ridicules the interviewer Ruth Waterbury by commenting:

> "Whereas she [Waterbury] looked upon me as a stupid 'chorus girl' who didn't appreciate her astonishing good luck, I looked upon her as artistically retarded not to know that ten years of professional dancing was the best possible preparation for "moving" pictures. . . I asked her if she had ever seen Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn dance, or if she had heard of Martha Graham's sensational success in the *Greenwich Village Follies*. She had not. I didn't realize then that this small cultural conflict with Ruth Waterbury was merely the first instance of the kind of contempt that was destined to drive me out of Hollywood."[45]

Brooks seems well-aware that her acting ability derived primarily from her dance background. Her playful, androgynous style of movement is located somewhere in-between the expressiveness of modern dance, the flippant swing of the Flapper, and the stiff feminine posing of her Ziegfeld days. Her bodily movements and facial expressions are distinctly separate from the more heavily symbolic, expressionistic performance style of her German costars in *Pandora's Box*.

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[44] John Kobal, *People Will Talk* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 83. Also quoted in Paris, 129.

[45] Brooks, 18. See also Ruth Waterbury, "Youth," *Photoplay* (November 1927): 46-47, 134-135.

What were some of the connotations of the Flapper image in the late twenties and how might they resonate in a Weimar context? In 1927 at the height of the Flapper phenomenon in Hollywood and the popular press, Louise Brooks, who had just recently left *Ziegfeld's Follies* to make Hollywood films, was ranked fourth by the *Dramatic Index* of actresses who had major magazine pieces written about them.[46] When Pabst hired her for *Pandora's Box*, she was known as much for her hairstyle, clothing, and her Manhattanite sophistication, as for her acting ability. Her dancing background was also an important signifier of the Flapper "type," and like the discourse surrounding dancers, the Flapper was an equally conflicted icon.

The Flapper has certain bodily characteristics in common with the chorus girl of Hollywood films and, similar to the chorus girl, she was in the mid to late twenties, a particularly American phenomenon. The bodily design of the Flapper, her angular silhouette, combined with the fact that it was often described as being a "shape in motion" attracted both critical and interested eyes of the period. Martha Banta describes how in the American version of sex appeal in the early years of this century, "unrestrained sexuality was not the look that displayed itself the best before the

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[46] Clara Bow led the group with 19 major articles, followed by Joan Crawford(14), Colleen Moore(11), and Louise Brooks(10). Quoted in Paris, 130.

general public. *Outline, silhouette, design, shape,* and *pose* are the terms most applicable ... to the selling of personality and the attainment of celebrity."[47] Other descriptions of the Flapper also emphasize design over flesh. Lady Troubridge in 1925 described the Flapper as "a perfect machine moved by the elixir of youth."[48] The description of the Flapper's "kinetic silhouette" bears a striking resemblance to those nude silhouette shots of chorus girls we find in so many film musicals of the thirties.

The almost sexless androgyny of the Flapper reflects the visual obsession with symmetry, geometric design, and machines that we also find in representations of the chorus girl. The slim, androgynous body type of chorus girl and Flapper both display themselves through their dancing. The Flapper's performance of the tango and Charleston exposed as much leg and created as much scandal as the costumes of the Ziegfeld girl. The Hobart College *Herald* objected to the "modern dance" of the Flapper because "'it is immodest and lacking in grace' and because it was based 'on a craving for abnormal excitement. . . The dance in its process of

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[47] Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideal in Cultural History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 622.

[48] Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 241. See also Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

degradation has passed from slight impropriety to indecency, and now threatens to become brazenly shameless.'"[49] A contradiction becomes apparent in these descriptions of the Flapper, the same contradiction that is apparent in Kracauer's argument about the Tiller Girls. While on the one hand, writers describe the Flapper's image as sexless, almost boyish and represent it as abstracted silhouette, other writers discuss the "brazenly shameless" nature of the Flapper's dance style, fashion, and moral behavior. How can the chorus girl or the Flapper expose "the place where the erotic resides" without being erotic?

Abstraction and a Slippery Escape in *Pandora's Box*

In *From Caligari to Hitler* Kracauer praises George W. Pabst as a director of photographic realism, but he reserves a different assessment for *Pandora's Box*. He claims that "*Pandora's Box* was a failure. . . . but not for the reason most critics advanced." According to Kracauer

> the film's weakness resides not so much from the impossibility of translating this dialogue into cinematic terms as from the *abstract nature* of the whole Wedekind play. It was a texture of arguments; its characters, instead of living on their own, served to illustrate principles. Pabst blundered in choosing a play that because of its expressive mood, belonged to the fantastic postwar

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[49] George Critoph, "The Flapper and her Critics," in *Remember the Ladies: New Perspectives on Women in American History: Essays in Honor of Nelson Manfred Blake*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1975), 149.

> era rather than to the realistic stabilized period.[50] [Emphasis mine]

Kracauer's criticism here takes up two different points: first, how the play leads to a performance style which emphasizes one-dimensional characters; second, the historical misplacement of the style or "mood" of the film. The "abstract nature" of the play and its characters are too "expressive" for the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) aesthetic of 1924-1928. Quoting Potamkin, Kracauer concludes that the film is "atmosphere without content."

Pabst's version of the story of Lulu does indeed emphasize mise-en-scene over narrative, that is, if you consider Lulu as a part of the mise-en-scene. The story glides smoothly, almost randomly, not least because of Pabst's cutting on movement, from spectacle of Lulu to spectacle, ending finally with her smiling death in the arms of Jack the Ripper. Other characters in the film, Dr. Schoen (Fritz Kortner), his son Alwa (Franz Lederer), and the Countess Geschwitz (Alice Roberts), are led to disaster and ruin by their desire of Lulu. In Wedekind's play Lulu remains uncaring and even vindictive over others' feelings for her; in *Pandora's Box*, however, Brooks performs a Lulu who seems at once childlike and maternal and surprisingly

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[50] Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 179.

undisturbed by the expressive angst surrounding her.[51] Her performance does not seem abstract in the way that Kracauer imagines; Brooks does not portray a standard femme fatale, but neither does she participate in what, without her, would seem more of a melodrama. Her performance seems subtle and understated compared to the rather uniform nature of the other characters.

According to Mary Ann Doane's reading of *Pandora's Box*, the criticism of both Kracauer and Potamkin demonstrates a confusion about the expressionistic aspects of the film and what they saw as Pabst's "capitulation to the demands of the image versus the referent, the decorative versus the substantial," qualities which, as Doane suggests, are also associated with the feminine.[52] Their accusation of "atmosphere without content" seems to point directly at Brooks's performance, which stands in stark contrast to those around her. Critics condemned her acting by saying "she does not suffer."[53] When Lulu is on the stand accused of her husband's murder, Brooks's slight frown of concern is quickly replaced by a beaming smile--an expression which appears

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[51] See Frank Wedekind's *Erdgeist* (1895) and *Die Buchse der Pandora* (1904) in *Five Tragedies of Sex by Frank Wedekind*, trans. Frances Fawcett and Stephen Spender (London: Vision Press, 1952).

[52] Doane, 154.

[53] Brooks, 95.

undirected and incorrectly matched so it seems to be aimed at everyone in the audience.[54] After her escape from the murder trial of her husband's death, she skips across rooms and runs through frames. The Schoens and Countess Geschwitz, on the other hand, demonstrate suffering through a paralyzing stiffness in almost every gesture. Schoen's shoulders slump and his brow furrows. Alwa's eyes grow large and despondent as he follows pathetically behind Lulu and his father. The Countess walks stiffly and cannot keep her eyes off of Lulu. Brooks's performance seems abstract and atmospheric by the contrast to the expressionistic style of her costars, but it is certainly not without content.[55]

Kracauer's bias against the abstracted, feminized atmosphere of *Pandora's Box* recalls his earlier condemnation of the abstract nature of the mass ornament as represented by the chorus girl. The spectacle of woman blocks critical thinking and reinforces the mechanics and logic of capitalist

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[54] See Elsaesser's argument in "Lulu and the Meter Man" for his extensive analysis of Pabst's use of incorrect matches in *Pandora's Box*. He observes about the incorrect matches in the scene with the meter man that the "excess" of Lulu's smile "breaks the strictly narrative function of her presence within the frame, and makes her a figure of desire in and for the spectator's imaginary," 18. Doane also refers to the incorrect eyeline matches that emphasize her treatment as "image," 150.

[55] Brooks recounts how the other actors, particularly Fritz Kortner, "hated" her because they did not believe that she worked at her acting. She says that Pabst utilized this resentment in his direction of Kortner and the other German actors by encouraging their dislike of her in order to integrate that emotion into their performances. Brooks, 97.

production. The difference here is that Lulu stands out from the "chorus" and so she does not so much replicate the phenomenon of mass production as she becomes the ultimate object of exchange. In one scene she is literally sold into white slavery, first by photographs of her and then when she is asked to come into the room and turn around for the buyer. Schigolch (Carl Raschig) and Rodrigo Quast (Carl Raschig) are both obsessed with making money out of her body, either through putting her on stage or pimping for her. But Lulu continues to slip through the fingers of those who wish to exploit her. She escapes from potential slavery by exchanging clothes with a sailor. She chooses her sex partners rather than charging them.

Lulu's slipperiness functions on one hand to make her the ideal object of capitalist exchange; she is all the more valuable because of the difficulty in 'pinning her down.' However, I wish to suggest another reading of this "slipperiness," one which coincides more with Kracauer's mention of the radical potential of the visual pleasure of the mass ornament. Certainly, Brooks's performance has visually pleased a number of critics. Is this pleasure necessarily all negative? Doane's reading of the film certainly makes sense in that, according to the phallocentric logic of the film, the slippery spectacle of Lulu must end in

"catastrophe" or death.[56] But one of the pleasures of the film involves Lulu's escaping over and over from her oppressively fixed positions. We need not overlook these moments of spectacle simply because the film ends in her death. Another reading of the spectacle of Lulu takes into account these suspended moments of animated pleasure which are achieved primarily by the contrast in movement styles. Lulu is most spectacular when she is in motion.

Pabst uses a variety of cinematic techniques which cause Lulu's character to visually contrast with the other characters. Many critics, starting with Lotte Eisner, have mentioned Pabst's use of the close-up as being the key to the narrative tension of the film.[57] Other critics mention how Pabst cuts on movement, but few have pointed out how specifically different Pabst's framing of Lulu's body in motion is from the rest of the film. Besides choreographing a large part of Lulu's character in motion, particularly during the first half of the film, Pabst frames her frequently in a long shot, particularly a 3/4 body or "American" shot, and then tracks the camera with her as she moves. The effect of these tracking shots is twofold: first, they underline the stiffness and heaviness of the

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[56] Doane, 148.

[57] See Eisner,16; Doane, 147; Elsaesser, "Lulu and the Meter Man," 26. Elsaesser also comments on the cutting on movement.

movements of the other characters, and second, her flights across the frame signify a number of equally ambiguous emotional states--escape, release, pleasure, fear.

One of the defining qualities of German expressionistic movement as well as German modern dance has to do with the constant interplay of tension and release or (*spannung/ entspannung*).[58] In *Pandora's Box* the German actors are all tension and Brooks is all release. Schoen, for example, rarely moves within the frame. Elsaesser observes how often Schoen's back is to the camera, so that all the viewer sees are his brooding shoulders atop an immobile and stiff upper body.[59] In the wedding scene where Lulu dances with Countess Geschwitz, Lulu is the only character who seems to be physically at ease. Schoen's shoulders are up around his neck. Alwa's are down around his knees. The Countess poses tersely against a wall. And Lulu runs between them all, smiling and bending forward gracefully to her guests as Pabst tracks her movements with his camera.

Pabst frames her movements in ways that are similar to how the chorus girl's body is fragmented and abstracted by the camera, but with some significant differences. Pabst almost always sets up her movements as the object of an

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[58] Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Susane Lahusen, ed., *Schrifttanz: A View of German Dance in Weimar Republic*, (London: Dance Books, 1990), 4.

[59] Elsaesser, "Lulu and the Meter Man," 21.

internal gaze that is voyeuristic and exploitative. As does the chorus girl, Lulu delights in her performances and takes no notice of the leers of desire directed at her. She performs for them and is delighted by her own performance, yet Pabst inevitably inserts the obviously exploitative look of desire which undercuts her own pleasure.

In the opening scene of the film, for example, Lulu "performs" first for Schigolch, her would-be father, upon his seemingly spontaneous suggestion. When Schigolch first arrives at Schoen's apartment, Lulu rushes past the meter man who is standing in the doorway and drags Schigolch across the entrance and into the apartment. The camera tracks her movements across and back the frame in a long, continuous tracking shot that shows the gracefulness of most of Lulu's body in motion. Once inside the apartment Schigolch, after taking her money and drinking her whiskey, convinces Lulu to dance while he plays the harmonica. Lulu improvises in front of a painting of herself dressed as Pierrot. Again we see a 3/4 body shot of her, which emphasizes the performance quality of the shot, as she does turns and bits of the Charleston. The pace gets more frantic as cross-cutting between Lulu's dancing and Schigolch's harmonica playing increases in tempo. Finally Lulu stops dancing and Schigolch suddenly gets angry at her for stopping. He rushes at her and raises the harmonica as if to strike her. She cowers a bit, afraid that he might hit her, and then suddenly and

inexplicably, both of them are laughing. Schigolch says in an intertitle: "You must be displayed to the public eye. I've brought along just the man to do it." He tells Lulu of Rodrigo Quast, an acrobat, who happens to be waiting on the street outside to meet her. At this point we realize that her performance was a set-up, that Schigolch was essentially auditioning her in order to "manage" her. The tension between Lulu's own pleasure and Schigolch's anger points to the volatility of the spectacle of woman. Pabst foregrounds this tension throughout his film and thereby points to that quality of the mass ornament that Kracauer seems determined to repress--the scopophilic economy that is directed at the most fragmented and abstracted of dancers.

Pabst fragments visually Lulu's body later in this same scene when Rodrigo comes up to the apartment to meet her. As he is introduced to Lulu, she admires the muscles in his arms. He flexes his arm which then acts as a frame around Lulu's admiring face. She graps hold of his arm, her chin resting on it while the rest of her swings as if on a trapeze. The camera cuts from a close-up of Lulu's face which is all smiles to a reverse shot of Schigolch who is leering at her face. Pabst cuts back to Lulu's face and then to a close up of her lower legs and shoes as she swings. He includes one more shot of her happy face and the scene ends. The cutting and framing of this scene fragments Brooks's body in much the same way that a musical revue might emphasize the

body parts of a chorus girl. But unlike the dance musical, Pabst complicates the masculine spectatorial position by including an obviously scopophilic gaze and thereby leaves open the potential for a critical feminine spectator position.

Pabst repeats this same strategy a few scenes later in Schoen's office when Lulu again swings as if on a trapeze, only this time she uses a window ledge. The voyeurs in this scene are Alwa and Geschwitz who are delighted by her antics and applaud her performance.[60] Pabst includes most of Lulu's body in many of these shots to emphasize the quality of her movement as she runs from character to character and then swings from the window. Alwa and Geschwitz are alternately pleased and desirous of her. At this point in the film, Lulu's pleasure in her own movements and dancing are not overwhelmed by either the exploitative efforts or possessive desires of those around her. The viewer is never unaware, however, that a paternalistic, scopophilic gaze is present. By the second half of the film, after Lulu escapes with Alwa, she has little space in which to move, figuratively and literally. Her movements appear more constrained, as does the framing of her body.

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[60] Even though Geschwitz is lesbian, her spectator position is coded as masculine. She does, however, sacrifice money and her body to help Lulu when she is being framed and exploited by Schigolch, Rodrigo, and Alwa.

Another issue which is raised particularly in these two scenes of Lulu's mock "trapeze" performance is what has been described as the androgynous nature of Brooks's performance. Pretending to swing from a trapeze does seem a particularly boyish maneuver for a femme fatale. Brooks consistently wears an unaffected grin rather than a seductive pout on her face (although one occasionally appears). She dons a sailor's clothes in order to escape capture. She dallies with a lesbian. Does Lulu's androgyny make her into a sexless, abstracted ornament? Does Lulu remain erotic through her androgyny? Or is her androgyny just another part of the facade that makes Lulu so easily exchangeable, a part of the "erotic barter", as Mary Ann Doane describes it, between woman, the law, and desire?[61] Critics are split on this issue. For Elsaesser the "ambiguous" nature of Lulu's character, her "fluidity and lightning changes of place," signify the disruptive nature of her androgyny which disturbs both the mise-en-scene and the narrative.[62] Doane agrees with Elsaesser to an extent, but argues that inevitably Lulu's

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[61] Doane's use of "erotic barter" comes from Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: Univeristy of Minnesota Press, 1987), 516. Sloterdijk connects the erotic economy in Weimar Germany to a modern cynicism about sexuality in general, and masculine subjectivity in particular. Doane questions the "place of the female subject in such a configuration" and sees Lulu as an example of "all the losses and catastrophes afflicting modern consciousness" that get projected onto the female subject, 144.

[62] Elsaesser, "Lulu and the Meter Man," 22.

androgyny, "her mutability, her free-spiritedness," is linked to her feminine "desirability" and thus, fundamentally, to questions of her guilt.[63]

Lulu's androgyny resembles both the abstracted, sexless quality of the chorus dancer that Kracauer identifies and the "boyish" silhouette of the Flapper's image, and yet, as I argued earlier, both the chorus girl and the Flapper were conflicted discursive sites who were represented as sexually threatening as often as erotically benign. In *Pandora's Box*, Pabst's inclusion of the scopophilic gaze of desire from every other character in the film necessarily eroticizes what in and of itself may not seem erotic. Lulu becomes erotic, in the classical Hollywood sense, through the illusion of her seemingly passive "existence." But this illusion needs soft-focus, close-ups and plenty of cross-cutting to transform the feminine subject into the object of desire. Eroticism, like femininity, is constructed as much by the look of desire as by any sort of "essential" sexiness.

Lulu's rapid movements across the frame suggest more than her potential androgyny or spectacular existence; they activate her, both visually and narratively. The movement quality of Brooks's performance style signifies Lulu's tendency both to rush towards and then away from constraining situations, but it is rarely acknowledged that Lulu's

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[63] Doane, 153-154.

movements at times initiate a simultaneous narrative shift. In the much analyzed backstage scene, Pabst fills the frame with dynamic movement from all angles. The significant characters are often pushed out of the way by performers rushing by, dancers coming down stairs, and sets being raised. Pabst punctuates the well-choreographed chaos with close-ups of Schoen, his fiance, and Lulu as they eye one another. When Lulu spots them, she rushes across the floor, and the camera tracks *her* movement, rather than framing a moving mise-en-scene. Lulu tells the stage manager "I'll dance for the whole world, but not in front of that woman." Lulu actively creates a situation in which she demonstrates control over the rights to her performing body. She refuses to go on until Schoen consoles her. When Alwa and Schoen's fiance discover the two in an embrace, Lulu smiles smugly to herself and then sweeps triumphantly on stage.[64] We see briefly one of the very few shots of Lulu actually performing for an audience, as she glides across the stage, showgirl style, with a giant headpiece on.

Even when Lulu moves in ways that are seemingly "directionless," I disagree with assessments that describe

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[64] Doane suggests that this Oedipal scene is indicative of the "fixity" that underlies the illusion of movement in the film. She argues that the primal scene of discovery necessarily arrests any pleasure or ambiguity in Lulu's character. Doane, 150. I also see, however, how this scene indicates a more active role for Lulu. She orchestrates the primal scene which necessarily seems to disturb all other participants except for herself.

Lulu's movement quality as without meaning. In the scene following her escape from the trial, for instance, Lulu's physical movement signifies her own pleasure in her situation. Her pleasure is underlined by her participation as a female spectator of the popular German magazine, *Die Dame*. She flips idly through the pages as the camera shows the viewer in a reverse shot the object of *her* gaze. Lulu stops on images of men and women dressed androgynously in black bathing suits, running and playing ball on the beach. The image is remarkable both in its signifying of modernity, androgyny, and the point of view of a female spectator.[65] After Lulu puts the magazine down, she then smiles and jumps up. Pabst then frames, in an unusual long shot, a wide space of the apartment windows. Lulu runs from screen left to the middle of the space, pauses in a gesture of pleasure, and then, camera tracking, continues across the space. The intimacy of her private pleasure with the magazine seems somewhat diminished by the framing of this next shot. Her pleasure in her own movements is dwarfed by the enormity of the apartment space. The mise-en-scene foreshadows the her impending loss of control. In the next few shots, the camera frames Lulu more closely as she runs to her dressing room,

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[65] Petro argues that this scene "provides us with the clues to discern the historical process by which the popular arts in Weimar attempted to address a female viewing audience." She also mentions that *Die Dame* was known for "its experimentation with gender roles and female sexual identity," 80.

twirls and peeks at her clothes. At this point Alwa returns to find her in his father's apartment. She chases Alwa across the room and ultimately seduces him. This is the last moment in the film where we see Lulu in rapid movement. After she escapes with Alwa, the rest of her movements become as constrained as her character's situation.

Conclusion

Louise Brooks seemed to have a clearer understanding than many critics during the twenties of the purpose of her playing the part of Lulu. She understood why Pabst wanted an American style of performance rather than a German, why her background as a dancer, both Ziegfeld girl and modern dancer, was appropriate for the part, even if others did not. And finally, she understood why the poor reception of the film reflected both national biases and a general resentment towards actresses who did not play the game of "movie star" in the manner that the studios dictated. Brooks never accepted the restrictions that were placed on Hollywood starlets and, subsequently, was "blackballed" from making films soon after her return from Germany. She lived most of the rest of her life in seclusion and poverty.

Brooks's biography only tells us a small part of the conflicted discourse surrounding the role of the chorus girl during the twenties and, more generally, the figure of the woman in motion as spectacle. The Tiller girl, the Ziegfeld girl, and the Flapper, all generated criticism concerning

their overabundance of eroticism along with a fascination by their lack of it. Absent from most of this debate is both the figure of the dancer herself and the feminine spectator. Both figures create the possibility for discussing visual pleasure in ways that undermine the oppressiveness of the masculine spectator's objectification of feminine spectacle.

The role of the American dancer in Weimar Germany provides a more specific opportunity of forcing a masculine subjectivity in crisis to confront not only his role as voyeur of sexual other, but national other as well. Lulu's (and by extension, Brooks's) destruction can not be seen as simply a reconfirmation of masculine German subjectivity in the face of potential female American chaos. Pabst foregrounds the role of the voyeur/exploiter/lover too well to allow for a simple experience of visual pleasure of female spectacle. As Alwa walks off into the fog, ignorant of Lulu's murder by Jack the Ripper, the viewer is very much aware of his helplessness and aimlessness without Lulu. What this ending suggests about German national identity in 1928 may have different repercussions for the masculine and feminine spectator of *Pandora's Box*. For the feminine spectator, the potential for freedom, for solitary pleasure, for an enjoyment of one's own body is consistently crushed by the anxiety of the voyeur, although the momentary hopefulness is perhaps not forgotten. For the masculine spectator, there

is left only a long and lonely walk into the confusion of the fog.

CHAPTER 5
UNCANNY PERFORMANCES IN COLONIAL NARRATIVES: JOSEPHINE BAKER IN *PRINCESS TAM TAM*

In the opening of *Princess Tam Tam* (Edmond T. Greville, 1935) the white Parisian writer, Max de Mirecourt, fights with his status conscious wife, Lucie, over his failure to produce work and lack of involvement with the Parisian social set. After a particularly loud tirade from his wife who calls him "Failure! Cretin!", Max yells to his friend Coton, "Let's go among the savages. The real savages! Yes, to Africa!" The camera then zooms in on the wallpaper of Max's apartment which shows a man in white "desert" garb, standing beneath a palm tree. The film dissolves to a real palm tree somewhere in "Africa," the viewer is to assume, as there is no textual explanation. From here the camera pans right across a field of cacti that are large, rounded, and prickly. Suddenly, the camera stops on Josephine Baker's face framed by the cacti; it moves in for a close-up of her face as she flashes a brilliant smile at a herd of sheep.

This opening scene establishes a number of important issues that are barely submerged throughout the fantasy narrative of Max and Alwina (Baker's character). First, the references to "Africa," "savages," and palm trees

demonstrate the film's use of metonymic coding to establish racial difference, specifically "blackness," a process that continues throughout the film as all types of non-"white" ethnicity are collapsed into a generalized "African" or "Arab" or "Oriental."[1] Second, the narrative conflates the "problem" of women, such as Lucie and Alwina, with "savages" and with the underlying problem of masculine impotence--Max's writer's block and his disinterested wife. Finally, the film shows repeatedly the black feminine other, Alwina, within an *uncanny* frame, in this case, the prickly field of cacti that metaphorically suggest a threatening geography, a virtual *vagina dentata*.[2]

This chapter will be involved primarily with the question of the racial stereotype, with its inherent ambivalence and instability, and with the signifiers that generate racial difference, particularly with relation to the body and performance. My starting point is Baker's performance in *Princess Tam Tam* which frequently codes the

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[1] I use quotations around "blackness" and "whiteness" to suggest the instability of these terms as visual signifiers of racial difference. I do not retain quotes throughout the chapter. My use of these terms reflects the binary nature of the black/white dichotomy.

[2] My understanding of Freud's *unheimlich* (uncanny) concept is heavily indebted to Mary Ann Doane's use of the term in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 139-154. She uses the term to describe more specifically the uncanniness of the mise-en-scene of the home within certain women's films of the forties. I am applying the term to the obviously different context of the colonial narrative.

character Alwina with her own star persona. In order to interpret Baker's performance, I first examine her role in the French avant-garde and primitivist movements of the twenties and thirties and consider how representations of her race were metaphorically displaced through the emerging categories of "high" and "low" art. Then, using Frantz Fanon's work, I consider how the gaze at the performing black subject functions within a colonial economy of difference.[3] I unravel the ambivalent implications of "miscegenation" in colonial fantasies such as *Princess Tam Tam*. Finally, I analyze how the racial signifiers in Baker's final dance performance in the film sets up a situation that is analogous to Freud's description of the experience of the *uncanny*. The uncanny experience of Baker's dance number reveals the instability of not only the racial stereotype, but also the illusory nature of white, masculine, colonial identity.

Film theory has finally started to acknowledge that questions of race can subvert accepted models of the filmic apparatus. Critics such as bell hooks and Frantz Fanon forced film theory to recognize that the cinematic gaze operates differently when directed at "black" subjects.[4] Other critics, such as Donald Bogle, Thomas Cripps, Manthia

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[3] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

[4] bell hooks *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

Diawara, and Mark Reid have provided even more insights into the blind spots of ideologically white film studies.[5] The gaze at the black female, for example, is often built (in classical Hollywood cinema) on certain received ideas in white culture, many of which are contradictory in nature, about excessive sexuality or the lack or it, submissiveness and/or aggressiveness, and performance ability.[6] These "received ideas" or stereotypes demand an examination of the history of the scopic economy of the black female--an economy that is at work in film history, art history, anthropology, medical history, and popular culture.

In his article "White," Richard Dyer argues that "whiteness" cinematically constructs itself as the unseen or the invisible. "The colourless multi-colouredness of whiteness secures white power by making it hard, especially for white people and their media, to 'see' whiteness."[7] In

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[5] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum Press, 1973); Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford, 1977); Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," *Screen* 29:4 (Autumn 1988): 66-76; Mark A. Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[6] Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory." *Screen* 29:4 (Autumn 1988).

[7] Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen*: 24:6 (Nov-Dec 1983): 46. Other exceptions include the articles in *Screen* 29:4 (Autumn 1988).

narratives that work out colonial fantasies, such as *Princess Tam Tam*, the white voyeur makes no secret of his desire to witness racial difference. His fantasy is not only the "civilizing" of the uncontrollable "native," but also the desire to watch difference making a spectacle of itself, often through ritualized performances.[8] Underlying these performances one finds traces of the ambivalence that surrounds the white colonial gaze, an ambivalence, I will argue, that functions much like the Freudian *uncanny* and reminds the colonist/spectator that he is, in fact, in another country and *not-at-home*.

My understanding of racial difference focuses on the *boundaries* that society establishes rather than the "stuff" of ethnicity.[9] By focusing on boundaries, we are forced to deconstruct the binary construction of whiteness as much as blackness. Signs of ethnicity are established, according to Werner Sollers, through a "spatial metaphoric pool" that is historically determined. This metaphoric pool functions in many ways similarly to Greimas's reading grid in that associations are made through both iconic and semantic

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[8] James Snead makes reference to the "optical colonialism" of *King Kong* (Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper, 1933) in *White Screen, Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, ed. Colin MacCabe and Cornel West (New York: Routledge, 1994): 25.

[9] Werner Sollers, "Ethnicity," *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, ed. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975): xii-xiv; xv; 241.

coding. The signifying nature of contemporary ethnicity is one byproduct of a leisure culture that results from advanced industrial societies. Leisure culture participates in the formation of a modern nationalism which represents itself metaphorically, by either idealizing or erasing ethnic differences. The one difference that seems never to be erased in Western representation is the racial distinction between black and white. Part of my project in this chapter is to analyze how racial difference is represented in film by reference to a "spatial metaphoric pool" that has sprung a few leaks. The attempt to represent racial difference through Josephine Baker's performance in *Princess Tam Tam* inevitably reveals leaks, gaps, and moments of insecurity in the construction of "whiteness."[10]

Film theory has begun to acknowledge the ambivalence of the racial stereotype and its potential subversiveness by reading-against-the-grain of the film's ideological trajectory and also by theorizing black spectatorship.[11] Bell

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[10] My use of the term "ethnicity" in this chapter deserves some exposition. At the risk of being reductive, I often choose to use the term "ethnic" over "African-American" or "black" when discussing *Princess Tam Tam* or other texts which conflate a whole variety of ethnicities in opposition to "whiteness"; however, I try to use more specific terms whenever possible. The polarity of "whiteness" and "blackness" is undoubtedly the most extreme example of racial difference being worked out metaphorically in *Princess Tam Tam*, but it is not the only one.

[11] See Lester Friedman, ed. *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

hooks argues that numerous examples exist both within films and within the viewing situation in which the black subject is not just the object of a gaze, but is actively involved in "looking back" in critically subversive ways. Hooks asserts the existence of "a critical gaze, one that 'looks' to document, one that is oppositional."[12] The "oppositional gaze," the returning glare, opens up a subversive space in *Princess Tam Tam*. But "looking back" may involve more than literal gazing; for Hooks, it also seems to include bodily performances that "trouble" the gaze of the cinematic apparatus in some way. In *Princess Tam Tam*, for example, Josephine Baker's character "looks back" at critical moments: Alwina occasionally looks in direct address at the camera; she grins and sticks out her tongue at the camera. But the gaze at Baker's character seems to disturb the continuity of the cinematic text as much as her own moments of visual defiance. Baker's dance performances, then, might fall under the rubric of "oppositional," because whenever she dances, she seems to disperse and "trouble" the monolithic, or in other words, the "white" tendencies of the cinematic apparatus.

One scene in particular sets up Baker as the object of a number of different types of ideologically loaded gazes--some

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[12] See chapter on "The Oppositional Gaze" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 116.

erotic, some supportive, and others, I would describe as "colonial." During a fantasy sequence in Paris, Alwina asks Dar, Max's servant, to take her to a nightclub "where people are having fun." They go to a smaller club that is racially integrated. Soon Alwina starts to sing and dance. During her performance the camera takes close-up shots of the faces watching her. The first close-ups are variously "friendly." The expression on a white male's face shows his pleasure and his erotic gaze. A close-up of a female in blackface makeup appears more nostalgic. Dar's expression is pleased, though slightly worried. A friend of Lucie de Mirecourt who comes into the bar looks decidedly unfriendly and condescending. Her gaze is the gaze of the colonial oppressor. She sees Alwina's performance as an expression of her "primitiveness" and as an opportunity for embarrassing Alwina in the future. All of these gazes participate in the complicated layering effect of this scene's representation of Baker's dance performance and the relationship between her racial difference and the reactions of her spectators.

Malek Alloula says in *The Colonial Harem* that "colonialism is the perfect expression of the violence of the gaze."[13] But what about the suppressed violence of the oppositional gaze? In this scene from the film we do not see

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[13] Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, Trans. Myrna and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 131, ft. 27.

an oppositional gaze, but we do find gazes other than just the violence of the colonial oppressor. The nostalgia combined with the makeup on the face of the "black" woman in the audience particularly opens up an alternative reading. Why is she lost in thought? Why did the director make her skin tone darker? According to Thomas Cripps, after World War II, African-Americans were ready to receive European film products, largely due to the successes abroad of Josephine Baker and Paul Robeson. But when *Princess Tam Tam* was released in the U.S., the black press had few words of praise for Baker as she never seemed to "move beyond her role as brightskinned exotic dancer."[14] Another reading of the woman's expression, then, could be disappointment, an emotion that carries the trace of an(other) history--the forgotten resistance of the African-American spectator.

Baker, Primitivism, and the Avant-Garde

When Baker's character, Alwina, first meets Max de Mirecourt, she tells him that her name is Arabic for "small source." She seems to be the answer to all of his problems. He needs creative inspiration and a way to make his white wife jealous. Max had found Tunisia to be rather uninspiring. When he runs into Alwina stealing food in a cafe, however, he begins to look at Tunisia differently. Alwina becomes the "source" for Max's next novel, and thus

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[14] Cripps 310-311.

helps him to overcome his crisis of masculinity. Max's geographic choice for inspiration would not have been an unusual one for a Frenchman of the twenties or thirties. Both artists and anthropologists saw the "primitive," especially the "African primitive" as a refreshing alternative to the exhausted blandness of industrialized Europe. One of the most intriguing aspects of the primitivist movement during this period is the fluidity with which it breaches disciplines. Artists, such as Matisse and Picasso, were fascinated by the formal vocabulary that "primitive" cultures used to distort magically (from a Western perspective) reality. The magical "simplicity" of tribal culture is also what attracted the anthropologist who was equally stunned by the physicality of "primitive" man and woman. Although their Western prudence may have been shocked by the frank sexuality they witnessed, anthropologists generally envied their subjects' relationship to their bodies and their environments.[15]

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[15] See Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). She closely examines the diary entries of Bronislaw Malinowski, an early "cultural anthropologist" who worked with the Trobriand people in New Guinea in 1918. Malinowski's diary, which he apparently never wanted published, revealingly highlights the sexual ambiguity that the anthropologist often tries to repress in his work with "native" peoples. Torgovnick sees Malinowski's uncomfortable self-consciousness towards his own body as "an image of Western repression of the physicality we see in the primitive, an image that expresses fear of the body and contradictory desires both to preserve and vitiate its boundaries" 232.

The artist, the anthropologist, and the government official were all joined by their fascination and appropriation of these other cultures, particularly African cultures. French colonialism superficially embraced the exotic appeal of their colonies. From the arts to administration, France saw the colonies as inspiration for a whole variety of activities. As one West African administrator put it:

> The territory is not just raw material for finance, commerce, army and administration to work with; nor is it something to be made an idol of. It is a living body, and we must enter into relations with it if we are to govern it with full knowledge of what we are doing.[16]

The administrator's metaphoric embodiment of the colonies represents one way that colonial discourse justifies its appropriation of other cultures. But this colonial body is not a gender neutral one. The "body" that the colonial administrator wishes "relations with" is easily imagined to be a female one. Take, for example, the sequence from *Princess Tam Tam* that positions Baker's face within a field of cacti, simultaneously to positioning her firmly within the iconographic field of a feminized and colonized geography. The black body is metaphorically feminized and colonized in other ways as well. Edward Said's study of Orientalism

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[16] As quoted in Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1989): 148; see Robert Delavignette, *Freedom and Authority in French West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950).

locates the roots for this type of metaphoric allusion in nineteenth-century racist, biological literature which emphasized the Orient's "separateness. . . its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability" in order to provide a Western, masculine solution, i.e. colonialism.[17] Racial difference in *Princess Tam Tam* becomes, to use Soller's terms, a "spatial metaphoric pool" in which the signifiers of Baker's difference slide from "African" to "Arab" to "Oriental" to "American." This metaphoric sliding was apparent in the treatment of Baker's persona off-screen as well.[18]

The extent to which Josephine Baker directly inspired the French (and the American expatriate) avant-garde in the late twenties and early thirties should not be underestimated.[19] Many of the most recognizable names of modernism had some form of contact with her: Picasso, Calder, Cocteau, E.E. Cummings, Le Corbusier, Apollinaire,

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[17] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 206.

[18] For information on Baker's life see particularly Phyllis Rose's biography. See also Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon, *Josephine*, trans. Mariana Fitzpatrick (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Stephen Papich, *Remembering Josephine* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1976).

[19] See, for example, Kim Tanzer's discussion of Adolf Loos's architectural plans for Baker and her influence upon him in "Baker's Loos and Loos's Loss: Architecting the Body," Unpublished manuscript (1994).

Hemingway, Colette, Leger, Breton. Many represented her in their works in ways that foregrounded her generalized ethnic exoticism. As much as Baker's persona slides from culture to culture, it also seemed to flow from "high art" to "low art" representations, raising the question of the role that primitivism played in French culture during the thirties, and the way that primitivism's use of generalized ethnicities (most often the black other, and then the "Oriental") fit into modernist categories.[20]

The history of primitivism as a "legitimate" category of art poses a disciplinary dilemma in the 1930s. More than one critic has noticed that the role of the "historical avant-garde" as Peter Burger defines it, begins to shift in this period.[21] Andreas Huyssen, for example, describes how in the decades before the thirties, "in the art for art's sake movement, the break with society--the society of imperialism--had led into a dead end, a fact painfully clear to the best

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[20] There is a montage sequence in *Princess Tam Tam* that shows actual representations made of Baker by various Parisian artists. The representations range from "low art" caricatures of her body with exaggerated features to a "high art" bust of her head where her features are "smoothed out."

[21] Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Theory and History of Literature Series, Vol. 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

representatives of aestheticism."[22] Primitivism arrives on the art scene at this point and the attraction to France's colonial relations was seen as one way of attacking the bourgeois institutions of the "mother" country. Artists attempted to reintegrate art and politics, in effect to aestheticize politics, to "transform" social, cultural, and political relations. But, as Burger and Huyssen both note, soon thereafter art and politics begin to separate and the avant-garde becomes, on some levels, both institutional and "historical." What role did imperialism/colonialism have in these movements? Did the primitivist movement in art perpetuate colonial stereotypes or did it subvert them?[23]

The extent to which the avant-garde and its relationship to primitivism has been institutionalized is clear in James Clifford's criticism of the 1984-85 "Primitivism" show at the Museum of Modern Art.[24] This show collected tribal objects

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[22] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986): 7.

[23] The history of the relationship between primitivism, avant-garde artists and decolonization has yet to be fully articulated. See Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994).

[24] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); see also the published version of the MOMA show, William Rubin, ed. "Primitivism in 20th century art: affinity of the tribal and the modern," (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

from around the world and juxtaposed them with modern art of the Western "industrialized" world. Clifford contests the "affinity" between modern art and "tribal art" that the show tries to set up. Picasso's "Girl before a Mirror" may look superficially like a Kwakiutl mask, but they function in their respective cultures in entirely different ways. All the MOMA show demonstrates, argues Clifford, is that certain aesthetic properties, such as design or asymmetry are shared amongst cultures. However, certain affinities, according to Clifford, were not dealt with in the show--an important one being the repetition of certain designs of the body. At one point in his book, Clifford places together three images: the first is Josephine Baker in a photograph (Paris, ca. 1929) wearing her banana costume; the second, a wooden figure from Angola in the same full figure profile shot--knees bent, buttocks extended; the third, a costume design by Fernand Leger for "The Creation of the World" (1922-23) with the same pose.[25]

Clifford's juxtapositions implicate art history in the perpetuation of certain ambivalent stereotypes, in this case, a stereotype of bodily design. Clifford points to the fact that "affinities," by which he seems to mean iconic resemblances, are what constitute (to some degree), the visual components of both positive and negative stereotypes.

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[25] Clifford, 199. Leger was yet another artist who was inspired by Baker and represented her in his work.

And his juxtaposition of these images reveals the ambivalent reception with which some of these "affinities" might be received. Besides perpetuating some questionable stereotypes, the MOMA show also did not consider the historical relationship of people like Picasso, Leger, and Calder to the "negrophilie" movement of the twenties and thirties--"a context," according to Clifford, "that would see the irruption onto the European scene of other evocative black figures: the jazzman, the boxer (Al Brown), the *sauvage* Josephine Baker."[26] The movement itself holds an ambivalent place in history. The "negrophilie" movement does not necessarily question the ambivalent combination of desire, fantasy, and guilt that is apparent in the justifications by writers in the twenties, thirties, and even the eighties for primitivism and its relation to colonialism. Neither does MOMA question the implications of the institutionalization of both primitivism and the avant-garde.

Perhaps Baker should not be seen as a figure that bridges this gap between low and high art, but rather as one of the last attempts to keep the gap from developing. If the thirties mark the beginning of the institutionalization of the avant-garde, then might not Baker and primitivism constitute the birth of this ambivalent separation? The role of the move towards decolonization here is not particularly

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[26] Clifford, 197.

clear. What is clear is how frequently the persona that artists, writers, and producers created out of Baker replicates many of the negative qualities of the colonial stereotype, even while they praise her for her artistic merits.

Baker herself, however, often subverted the stereotypes with her own comedic, parodic behavior.[27] Her parodic behavior is not as obvious in films such as *Princess Tam Tam*; it is more obvious in films made of her stage performances at the Folies Bergere and Casino de Paris.[28] In one early film, *The Plantation* (1926), Baker climbs down the trees of an enormous jungle stage set, at the bottom of which sleeps the plantation owner in full safari garb. While he sleeps, Baker performs her own particular African-American vernacular dance complete with parodic facial expressions. She, we are to infer, is his dream, a fantasy of the jungle, and yet she performs to the audience. Her performance combines both virtuoso technique and minstrel humor, and remains "safe" as

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[27] For an important theorization of the African-American status of parody see Henry Louis Gates, Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[28] Several of these films are available at the film archives of the George Eastman House, Rochester, NY. See *Josephine Baker, Star of the Folies Bergere and Casino de Paris: 1925-1935*, a compilation of her stage performances on film.

long as it is narratively contained within a dream.[29] Her parody (of the dreamer? of the audience?) provides no real threat. Film did not allow Baker the same opportunities for improvisation that the stage did, so we must read her performance in *Princess Tam Tam* as it is given to the viewer--tightly scripted within a narrative economy that is broken only occasionally by certain reminders of her star persona. These occasional moments, however, ambivalently resonate through the film. The line between her character and her star persona, like the relationship between the avant-garde and primitivism, is an uncomfortable one.

White Gazes, Black Parts

Clifford's questioning of the "affinities" that seem to govern racial stereotypes should lead us to a closer investigation of how the scopic economy naturalizes the relationship between the gaze and the performing black body. In order to fully articulate an alternative theory of the gaze and the black subject, we must address the specifics of how the gaze operates historically within the colonial economy. The effects of the colonial economy are made visible primarily through the *embodiment* of racial difference. Theater and film both offer spaces where a visible field creates the possibility for a spectacle of the

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[29] Her performance style, which is discussed more specifically later in this chapter, plays off certain blackface minstrel styles and thus carries with it some negative connotations as well.

body, particularly the female body. The theoretical connections between the "otherness" of both the black and the female body are made visible in the colonial body.

Frantz Fanon has written about the effects of body consciousness on the psyche of the "person of color" in the colonial context, although he assumes only the male perspective:

> In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. . . . A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world--definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world.[30]

The effects of this difference, a difference imposed from without, are visible not just because of skin color, but because of a whole history of cultural products that objectify and dehumanize the body. This body consciousness, then, is based on what Fanon calls the "historico-racial schema" built "by the other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories." The effects of this body consciousness leads to a "certain uncertainty," to a stereotypical knowledge that is undermined by an ambivalence with regards to the presentation of the bodily self. Body consciousness for the textually constructed person of color parallels much of the recent feminist writing

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[30] Fanon, 110-111.

about the relationship between women and their bodies, with some significant differences. The differences would reside, using Fanon's methodology, in the historico-racial schema, in the myths, stories, histories that have been applied to women. We should also speak of an historico-sexual schema (as many feminists have done).[31]

In order to find examples of what I will call the "historico-racial-sexual schema" for *Princess Tam Tam*, one obvious place to start are the metaphoric allusions to the colonies themselves. Colonial metaphors, whether made by artist, scientist or explorer, often feminize geographic locale. It is not merely coincidental, as Mary Ann Doane points out, that Freud describes the field of female sexuality as a "Dark Continent."[32] Biological literature is another site that hides some of the more offensive examples of the desire of the colonial gaze to witness the embodiment

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[31] Of course, there are further subdivisions that could break down according to sexual preference and class distinctions. What I find significant in Fanon's work is his theorization of a type of body-consciousness that seems particularly applicable to gender as well as racial differences.

[32] See Mary Ann Doane's chapter, "Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," in *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge Press, 1991): 209-248; Anne McClintock, "Maidens, Maps, and Mines: The Reinvention of Patriarchy in Colonial South Africa," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 87: 1 (Winter 1988); Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

of racial difference. As Sander Gilman has pointed out, scientists of the nineteenth century drew obscenely detailed studies of anatomical difference, especially female genitalia, in order to justify their theories of backwardness.[33] Sarah Bartmann, one of several "Hottentot Venuses" exhibited to European audiences during the early nineteenth century was violently separated into parts after her death. The medical profession "studied" her genitalia as a means of "explaining" Bartmann's sexuality and, ultimately, her inferiority. These literal and metaphoric autopsies, argues Gilman, never occurred within a vacuum. The "scandal" of Sarah Bartmann's body was not just over her nudity or the measure of her bodily difference. She arrived in London at a time when the abolition of slavery was also hotly debated.[34] Bartmann's story does not just represent the horror of uncontained medical curiosity; it represents the horror of a crisis of empire. The black body is the fragmented site of a fetishistic economy--an economy that organizes the colonial imagination, an economy that makes the nation possible.

Artists also participated in fetishizing the buttocks, the breasts, and the ear size of the black subject. These body parts were assumed to be unusually large in the white

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[33] Sander L. Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature," *Critical Inquiry* No. 12 (Autumn 1985): 204-242.

[34] Gilman, 213.

prostitute as well. The process of feminizing the black other seems impossible without reference to bodily difference--to skin color, to size of lips or clitoris or buttocks, to athletic prowess, and performance ability. The fragmenting of the black female body into parts was often made through references to the dancing body. Anthropologists would call attention to the rapid movement of the buttocks, the shaking of the breasts and head--movements that were nonexistent in white Western vocabularies of gesture.[35]

Josephine Baker's body was often fragmented through white writings. She herself, commenting on others' comments of her buttocks said, "The rear end exists. I see no reason to be ashamed of it. It's true there are rear ends so stupid, so pretentious, so insignificant that they're good only for sitting on."[36] With a remarkable linguistic twist Baker personifies the buttocks, that muscle which, for individuals who merely sit on it behind a desk or in a chair, is rendered useless. Baker's metaphor sets up an unusual angle from which to theorize white spectatorship of black exoticism. For the audience member is undoubtedly sitting on his/her buttocks, while Baker is vigorously exercising hers on stage. What can be said, in a performance situation, about the relationship between moving and nonmoving parts of

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[35] See Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

[36] Rose, 164.

the body? Can we theorize a white anxiety about the buttocks? An anxiety that can only be assuaged through a specular consumption of the other's moving parts?

Bell hooks finds alternative readings of the fetishization of black buttocks in Baker's dance style as well as in Spike Lee's film *School Daze*. In one dance scene from *School Daze*, students are dancing to the music of "Doin' the Butt" in what hooks declares as "one of the most compelling moments in the film:"

> The black "butts" on display are unruly and outrageous. They are not still bodies of the female slave made to appear as mannequin. They are not a silenced body. Displayed as playful cultural nationalist resistance, they challenge assumptions that the black body, its skin color and shape, is a mark of shame.[37]

Hooks notes that the sexism of Lee's *School Daze* complicates her reading of the dance scene, although she still contends that the number is a positive reappropriation of the fetishized, black, female body. Mark Reid also criticizes Lee's sexism and notes that this blind spot feeds into Lee's overall tendency to avoid "any constructive critique of the socioeconomic processes that promote misunderstanding between ethnic and racial working-class groups."[38] The problem with this scene in *School Daze* is that it potentially reinforces the fetishizing of the black body by white culture. However,

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[37] hooks, 63.

[38] Reid, 102.

I agree with hooks in that it is equally important to foreground the celebratory and radical potential of "Doin' the Butt." Baker's dance style contains similar problems in terms of the nature of its spectacle. Through an alternative reading of Baker's dancing, I will invoke the history of African and African-American dance styles in order to suggest more fully how the dancing body might disturb rather than simply reinforce the "white" cinematic gaze in *Princess Tam Tam*.

Ambivalence and Miscegenation

An important part of the colonial imagination involves not only the metaphoric "conquering" of a geographic space, or the fetishizing of body parts, but also the literal and metaphoric "penetration" of the feminine. The black female body serves metonymically to represent the colonial challenge: if the colonist can seduce a native, then he can also seduce a people. The dancing, black, female body often performs within the frame of the colonial fantasy of miscegenation. Miscegenation, or the threat of it, is part of the narrative drive of *Princess Tam Tam*, but with an important twist: Max, the writer, *pretends* to seduce Alwina in order to provide him with a story for his book. Or, to be more specific, the seduction occurs without her knowledge as much of the film takes place during an extended fantasy sequence in which Max takes Alwina back to Paris, disguised as the "Princess of Parador." An important part of the

seduction, however, does occur during the "present time" of the film. What seems significant here is Max's awareness that the narrative of interracial relations is indeed a seductive one--a story that would sell many books and make his wife jealous at the same time. The fantasy flash-forward to a possible future facilitates the narrative, while lessening the threat contained in it. The real seduction is mostly fictionalized and thus relegated to the apparent safety of the realm of fantasy.

In most of Josephine Baker's films her characters are not romantically involved with the white lead actor. She is usually either matched up with an "ethnic" male or she remains alone. Baker apparently was upset at this anomaly, particularly since she was married to a white man, Pepito Abatino, who helped to write and produce *Princess Tam Tam*. According to Phyllis Rose, Baker protested her character's marriage to the Tunisian servant Dar; she felt that she should at least have married the "Eastern" Maharajah. Rose argues that both *Princess Tam Tam* and *Zou Zou* (1934) reflect Abatino's own desire to take credit for Baker's "Pygmalion"-like transformation. His refusal to allow the consummation of interracial desire on screen reveals, she suggests, his own ambivalence about the prevailing attitudes towards interracial marriage.[39]

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[39] Rose, 164.

The term "ambivalence" is frequently used in writings about theories of racial difference, this chapter included. Early in *Princess Tam Tam* ambivalence is brought into direct relation with an emotional response to the threat of/hope for miscegenation. Directly following the scene in Paris where we see Max's wife being kissed by the Maharajah, Max approaches Alwina in his villa in Tunisia. He has already convinced her to move in with him so that he can "civilize" her. In this scene, which is still the present time of the film, he tells her that he loves her. The following exchange takes place between Prejean and Baker:

> Alwina: "Why do you say you love me?"
> Max: "Because I feel something for you."
> Alwina: "A feeling?"
> Max: "I like you. I enjoy being with you. And you?"
> [The camera shifts briefly to Coton, Max's companion, who is furiously taking notes.]
> Alwina: "Me? I think you're nice."
> Max: "Are you moved by me?"
> Alwina: "What does moved mean?"
> Max: "Confused. "
> Alwina, musing to herself: "Confused? . . . Moved?"

Later in the scene Alwina agrees that she is indeed confused about her feelings for him. Max takes this as a sign of her love for him. Importantly, he has deceived her in order to get her to talk. Even more importantly, perhaps, he has defined the limits and the language of love for her. She might feel "confused" over her feelings for him, but he is never in doubt about whether he would return his affection. He does not seem the least bit attracted to her. He notices her beauty and he delights in her humor, but he treats her as

little more than a child. Alwina is merely the key to his success. She is his "small source" of inspiration.

Ambivalent feelings about the potential for miscegenation are an important part of the colonial narrative that resembles, not surprisingly, the colonial situation with all of its "primitive" attractiveness, its natural and human resources ready for economic exploitation, and its underlying tension of oppression. Homi Bhabha points out how discussion of the colonial stereotype has tended to deny its inherent ambivalence and to instead "fix" the stereotype as a moment of stable identification.[40] He also suggests that the ambivalence of the racial stereotype functions similarly to the ambivalence of the Freudian fetish:

> For fetishism is always a 'play' or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity--in Freud's terms: 'All men have penises'; in ours 'All men have the same skin/race/culture'--and the anxiety associated with lack and difference--again, for Freud, 'Some do not have penises'; for us 'Some do not have the same skin/race/culture'.[41]

What Bhabha does not point out, however, are the differences for the ethnic woman who is already "castrated" *and* of a different "skin/race/culture." The fact that the black woman does not have to be symbolically castrated anew as the black man means that she can be seduced, romanced, brought back to

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[40] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* 24:6(Nov-Dec 1983).

[41] Bhabha, 26.

France and fetishized in ways that the black man cannot. She represents a different kind of threat and ambivalence. Sexual and racial difference also explains the feminizing of the colonial geography. As long as the land is feminized, then it is castrated, tameable and in need of a white, Western male. No wonder the colonial romances we see in films and novels almost always involve a "white" man and an "ethnic" woman: the ultimate colonial conquest is always the other's body. The ambivalence of the colonial romance is two-fold: the rejection/acceptance of the white male as lover, the rejection/acceptance of the white male as colonial oppressor. The interesting moments in the colonial romance texts are always when we discern the threat of failure--when the disavowal of the fetish is laid bare.

The previously cited scene in *Princess Tam Tam* foregrounds the ambivalence of the interracial romance from both sides and the disavowal of the black woman as fetish object. We witness Max instructing Alwina in how to feel. She is not confused, he tells her. She is in love. But the rest of the scene destabilizes this definition of love. After Alwina wonders to herself, "Confused? . . . Moved?" she wanders over to Coton's table and notices him writing:

> Alwina: "Why is he always near us?"
> Max: "He's my slave."
> Alwina: "I didn't know you people had slaves."
> Coton: "I am a 'Negro', my dear."
> Alwina: "You? I don't like you. You're always making fun."
> Max: "Do you like me?"

> Alwina: "'Confused' you called it before? What's it like to feel confused?
> Max: "Your heart beats very fast."
> Alwina: "Well, then, I'm confused."
> Max: "Good night. Go to bed."
> Coton: "No good night for me?"
> [Alwina, looking straight at the camera in a direct address, sticks her tongue out and runs out. The men laugh.]

The ambivalence of interracial relationships is specifically linked to the colonial narrative. Alwina identifies the "joke" that Coton is Max's slave as a part of that narrative. White people are not "Negroes" and thus they cannot be slaves. How, she might wonder, can she, a black woman and potential "slave," be a white man's lover? Her confusion over her feelings for Max is like the confusion (and irritation) she feels over Coton's joke.

The subversive moment in this scene, the moment when the ambivalence of miscegenation is not only foregrounded, but reacted against, occurs when Alwina sticks out her tongue. The direct address of the shot breaks the diegesis of the sequence. It startles the viewer momentarily. Her impertinence is directed at the audience as much as Coton. Alwina/Baker is not a person to be joked about. She will not fit neatly into the colonial romance. Alwina (and the viewer) are reminded in this scene that she does not have the same "skin/race/culture" and it is the recognition of her racial difference that underlies her treatment as love object/fetish object. Her defiant expression momentarily reveals the implications of the white man's disavowal of her

racial and sexual difference. Alwina's status as a fetish object thinly disguises the white man's own anxiety about his assumed racial and sexual superiority.

Dance, Rhythm, and the Uncanny

> The dance of the Negresses is incredibly indecent. They form a circle and mark time by a movement of the top of their bodies in front and by clapping the hands. Each of them leaves her place in the circle and takes her turn in the middle; she gets into positions so lascivious, so lubricous that it's impossible to describe them . . . . It's true that the Negresses don't appear to have the depraved intentions which one would imagine; it's a very old custom, which continues as it were innocently in this country; so much so that one sees children of six performing this dance, certainly without knowing what they're leading up to.[42]

Some of the earliest recorded accounts of Western explorers to Africa include references to dancing practices. Richard Jobson, a seventeenth century explorer, wrote the following description of African customs on the Gambia River:

> The most desirous of dancing are the women, who dance without men, and but one alone, with crooked knees and bended bodies they foot it nimbly, while the stander-by grace the dancer, by clapping their hands together after the manner of keeping time.[43]

Jobson's account is evidence of an early fascination with African dancers, women in particular. The Roger's epigraph cited above, however, demonstrates the more pernicious

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[42] Rose 28. From J.-F. Roger, *Fables senegalaises*, (1828), quoted in Leon-Francis Hoffman, *Le Negre romantique: Personnage litteraire et obsession collective* (Paris: Payot, 1973).

[43] Thompson 32.

effects of an historico-racial-sexual schema that directs the white Western gaze at the black female body in ways that exoticise and objectify her.

Jobson's description of the Gambian women dancing "with crooked knees and bended bodies" could easily describe some of Josephine Baker's most recognizable moves. Her dance style resembles an American vernacular style of performance that was adapted from West African styles that travelled overseas.[44] Baker's style slides fluidly from the bent knees of the Charleston "fan" to the bent knees of Congo dance rituals. A closer examination of Baker's pastiche-like dance style within the context of *Princess Tam Tam* reveals some of the reasons for the ambivalence with which her performance is received.

In one of the most visually complex scenes of *Princess Tam Tam*, the cinematic apparatus constructs a complex layering of gazes. Prior to this scene, Lucie and her friends have jealously plotted to embarrass the African Princess. They encourage Alwina to drink at an elegant Parisian nightclub in order to induce the "primitive" side of Alwina's nature to come out. The scene begins with Alwina sitting alone at a table witnessing the spectacle of a Busby

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[44] Some of my knowledge of West African dance comes from my experience with Chuck Davis's African-American Dance Ensemble in Durham, NC. See Jean and Marshall Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); James Haskins, *Black Dance in America: A History Through Its People* (New York: T.Y. Cromwell, 1990).

Berkeley style dance number. As she begins to get drunk, the scene before her (and the viewer) begins to grow more and more fantastic.

The dance number is weirdly framed by dissolves, magical disappearances, and hypnotic spirals. A spiral design opens the dance number and fills the cinematic frame, apparently visible to the film viewer, rather than to the nightclub audience. The spiral motif is especially interesting as its design is repeated in the costumes of the dancers and in their Busby Berkeley-type formations. The chorus line emerges from the superimposed spiral design, after which the dancers re-create the spiral through an aerial shot of their formation. Then the camera cuts to a shot of the dancers' arms as they form a circle with their hands pointing towards the center. The arms unfold to reveal a succession of female faces, in a pattern that looks exactly like the iris of a camera opening and closing. The repetition of the spiral induces a dizziness in the audience as well as in Alwina.

The choice of the repeating spiral is significant for a number of reasons.[45] First, the dissolves and the framing of the graphics cinematically break the diegesis. Second, the moving spiral is coded to suggest a dizziness that leads to hypnotism. The reference to hypnotism positions the

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[45] Thompson xii. The Tiv people of Nigeria also have a dance ritual that uses a spinning top. The dancers represent the spinning motion in their routine.

spectator in a psychologically sensitive state. Moreover, the repetition of the design in the costumes, graphics, and formations of the dancers suggests the Freudian *unheimlich*--the uncanny. For Freud, the uncanny is a moment when a familiar sight is suddenly made strange and the (neurotic male) viewer experiences a disorienting crisis of identity.[46] The uncanny experience of the repetition of the spiral is compounded by the fact that the design itself is already coded as a disorienting visual effect. But most importantly, the spiral design in this musical number is also associated with what, according to Freud, is the primary uncanny experience--the sight of the female genitals, the sight of lack. The chorus dancers facilitate the uncanny view with a number of their dance moves. Their legs literally open to reveal the threat of castration. The opening of the dance number foregrounds the connections between the uncanny, perception, and the dancing female body. When the arms of the dancers open like an iris to reveal the smiling face of woman, the connection is undeniable. The viewer is left dazed, dazzled, and hypnotized.

But how is the uncanny experience of the dance number connected to racial difference and the colonial narrative? Alwina's intoxication parallels the viewer's metaphoric entry

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[46] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), vol. 17, 226.

into the altered psychological state of the uncanny. But her intoxication does not allow her to experience the uncanny, but rather, to become it. Her difference is not only sexual, but racial. The colonial narrative works to reveal her "primitive" nature. The drunker Alwina gets, the more she is fascinated with what is happening on stage. But Alwina's revelation of racial difference cannot occur until the musical number itself undergoes some significant shifts. The first shift occurs when the camera again focuses on the spiral design, which dissolves into spiral tops that are part of an Asian acrobatic act. Here the colonial relationship inevitably surfaces in the coded reference to France's Asian colonies, but it surfaces in a way that privileges design and form over other codes. The repetition of the spiral smoothly sutures over other differences. But the act needs one more shift in order to get to Alwina's specific difference, her "blackness." Suddenly the music changes to the incessant rhythm of a drumbeat and the film cuts to a shot of a black male drummer. The drummer is visually cut off from the diegetic space of the musical scene. At this point the film cuts back to Alwina who is starting to become visibly excited. A chorus line comes onto stage miming the Conga, a tribal line dance. As Alwina gets more excited, the editing cuts grow shorter and faster, while the drumbeat grows louder. When all three reach a frenzy, the film has

positioned Baker's performance as the "climax" of the narrative.

At the beginning of her dance, Alwina kicks off her shoes and they fly into the audience--a move which Josephine Baker was well known for doing in her own acts. Then she tears off part of her elegant dress, that changes from gold to black, and proceeds to dance barefoot on the stage. Baker's dance style is distinctly different from the chorus dancers. Her movements are less restrained and less frontally oriented.[47] Baker defies most conventions of Western ballet dancing: she turns in circles, with her back to the audience; she moves her head up and down; she shakes her breasts. Many of her moves are recognizable as forms of West African dance that were preserved in American vernacular dances. Baker's impassioned face is intercut with shots of the drummer, while the rhythm of her dance moves parallels the rhythm of the drum.

The connections between rhythm, the dancing black body, and the colonial narrative are foregrounded in this scene from the film. The excited spectators in the audience, the quick cuts, the beating drum, and Baker's dance movements participate metonymically in the revelation of racial and sexual difference. Rhythm serves as an important structuring

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[47] The Western ballet tradition, for example, is frontally oriented. Most movements are designed to give the audience (in a theater that sets up a 180 degree field of orientation), the most visibility.

device in the colonial narrative; it gives shape and pattern, an underlying dynamic. Like the removal of her outer gold dress which reveals a black costume beneath, Alwina's bodily response to the rhythm of the drum reveals her "blackness." Max cannot bear to witness Alwina's revelation. He literally turns his head away from the stage to avert his gaze. On the other hand, the audience loves her. Her movements, even though highly stylized, seem strangely impassioned compared to the uniformity of the French chorus line. The juxtaposition of dance styles does more than just set up the ambivalent narrative response. It also highlights the attraction/repulsion of the colonial gaze to the colonized body.

Richard Dyer points out that "'The fear of one's own body, of how one controls it and relates to it' and the fear of not being able to control other bodies, those bodies whose exploitation is so fundamental to capitalist economy, are both at the heart of whiteness."[48] The staging of black performance, then, is intimately connected to a white anxiety over bodily control. The colonist fears that his own inability to control his body will resurface in his inability to control the bodies of the colonized; therefore, he repeatedly sets up a supposedly "safe" space for black performance. This "safe" space, whether the space of the

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[48] Dyer, 63.

artist, the anthropologist, the colonial administrator, or the nightclub producer, is always an ambivalent one. When Max turns his head away from Alwina's performance, he reveals his own uncanny reaction: he is *not-at-home*.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

More work remains to be done on the role of the woman in motion in modernist performance during the first decades of the twentieth century. The modernist body is typically described as fragmented and objectified by the new technology of film. Film often framed the woman's body in close-ups or in the kaleidoscopic patterns of chorus lines, but certain films represented the woman's *entire* body as it filled the edges of the frame, creating a new vocabulary of movement, which was individualized and expressive. A closer examination of physical culture, modern dance, and the women's movement provides a narrative about the body in motion that counters the masculinist vision of fragmented, female body parts arranged in modern, machine-like designs. The rhythms and designs of modern dance reflect an integrated vision of a body that launches through space, dives back to the ground, melds with the earth, and leaps back up again. These movements suggest a syntax of femininity that seems defiantly modern when compared to Victorian images of restraint, although this modernism is quite different from Berkeley's chorus girl or Marinetti's Futurist dancer.

The women of this study all demonstrate types of movement that are connected to physical culture, modern dance, and certain types of ethnic and folk dance. Their gestural as well as their dance performance styles semiotically reflect these backgrounds in ways that are readable for the historicized spectator. More research needs to be done to understand fully the relationship between images of women in motion and the film spectator. Uncovering more interdisciplinary connections between the body, symmetry, rhythm, and space would also provide insight into the design and architecture of twentieth century movement. I hope that this study has at least established that historical connections exist between images of women in motion, physical culture and modern dance techniques, art movements, and critical discourse about movement, dance, and mechanical reproduction.

The four women of this study, as performers, demonstrate the duality that lies at the heart of spectacle. They are all pulled between worlds that both exploit and empower them. Loie Fuller was one of the first performers to weave together the materials of silk and celluloid to create a new vocabulary of cinematic bodily motion. The undulations of her cloth were about design more than body, her femininity about disappearance more than revelation. Fuller always managed to temper the titillation of her translucent costume with her artistic integrity. She inspired a revolution of

the body that Isadora Duncan and others carried to the public.

Lillian Gish's acting style in *The Wind* also reflected the influence of physical culture, particularly her modern dance training. Her style was more closely associated with expressionistic codes of gesture than with either the histrionic codes of melodrama or the newer verisimilar codes of Hollywood film acting. Gish's expressionistic gestures in this film connoted the physical and emotional codes of the frontier woman's narrative. Her movements match the intense, torso-leading style of modern dancers who also pursued themes that sought to define an "American" dance.

Louise Brooks's acting style in *Pandora's Box*, on the other hand, reflected the spontaneity and lightheartedness of a Hollywood Flapper, particularly when measured against the style of her Germanic costars. Pabst framed and fragmented Brooks's body, much like Berkeley's American chorus girl; however, Pabst also framed her so that the effect of her entire body catapulting across the frame would be visible. Brooks was no mass ornament, neither was she a heavily expressive actress. Her movements set in motion a chain of desire and disaster, the spectacle of her performance resulting in her exploitation and death. Brooks never remained merely a passive chorus girl spectacle; her movements across the frame initiated action, propelling the plot forward, while serving as a visual critique of Weimar

masculinity.

Josephine Baker's performance in *Princess Tam Tam*, similar to Brooks's in *Pandora's Box*, was also subject to the double-edged nature of female spectacle. Baker's African-American dance style reinforced some negative stereotypes of black female performance, while simultaneously serving as a critique of the white colonial gaze. The *uncanniness* of Baker's performance unsettles this gaze although it by no means empties these signifiers of racial difference of their inherent ambivalence. The black performer/white spectator remain separated by the gulf of colonial history, at the same time that their subject positions remain inextricably intertwined.

This dissertation begins with the scientific appeal of Loie Fuller's modern dance under electric lights and ends with the primitivism of Josephine Baker's performance in *Princess Tam Tam*. This trajectory suggests a modernism that moves from an infatuation with the new science and technology to a rejection of it, from a jingoistic national rhetoric of the body to a troubled post-colonial identity. Threaded through this trajectory travel images of the woman in motion, fluid signifiers of femininity that defined as much as they were defined by the modern experience.

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I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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